THE TREASURE-FINDERS

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Nearer and nearer came the big canoe. The Indians were overhauling their intended prey rapidly.—(See page 207.)

THE TREASURE-FINDERS.

A Boy's Adventures in Nicaragua.

BY JAMES OTIS. Kaler

Author of

"A Runaway Brig," "The Castaways," "Toby Tyler," "Mr. Stubbs' Brother," "Silent Pete," etc., etc.

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THE TREASURE-FINDERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE INDIGO PLANTATION.

BY FOLLOWING up the river to its source and then keeping in the valley we can reach the ruins in one day. Thirty-six hours there will give us plenty of time in which to hunt and to be home again before father comes."

"But I'm not sure I should like to loaf around the ruins after dark. Tongla says those who go there see horrible sights."

"Why, Dean Coloney, are you frightened at the stories of an Indian boy like Tongla?"

"It isn't fair to say I am frightened, Roy, simply because I don't care about visiting a lot of tumble-down buildings in which no one has lived for hundreds of years."

"Perhaps not; but it seems very much like it. Before he went to Granada, father said we might go for a long hunt, and there won't be another chance this season, for it is nearly time to extract the indigo, when both of us must remain here."

"I would be perfectly willing if you hadn't got

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into your head the crazy idea of exploring the ruins."

"Will you be satisfied if I promise not to stay near them except during the day-time?"

"With that agreement I'll be only too glad to go."

"Then it is settled. Let's begin to get ready now, so as to be able to start at sunrise on the day after to-morrow."

While the boys are preparing for the proposed excursion it may be well to formally introduce them as Roy and Dean, sons of Myron Coloney.

The former was a stout-limbed lad who had just passed his eighteenth birthday, while the latter, two years younger, seemed all too delicate for such a life as his coarse shooting-jacket, thick knee-boots and belt, in which was carried the long knife or sword known as a "machete," gave apparent evidence that he followed. Both the boys were browned by many weeks of exposure to a tropical sun, and looked so thoroughly "American" as to contrast strangely with their surroundings.

Eight months previous Mr. Coloney was a merchant in New York City; but, meeting with severe losses which threatened speedily to bankrupt him if some change was not made, he removed to the department of Granada, in the State of Nicaragua, where, several years before, a tract of land had been leased by himself and a number of other gentlemen for the purpose of raising and manufacturing indigo on a large scale.

The scheme was a failure, owing to the incompe-

tency of the overseer, and the property remained idle until Mr. Coloney took charge, in the hope of retrieving his fortunes.

Roy and Dean accompanied him, and had rendered no slight assistance, working like men, until the broad fields gave every indication of large returns for the outlay of labor.

Now, within the next ten days, the boys were expecting to see their mother. She had remained in New York while the experiment was being tried, but at the first real sign of success signified her intention of joining her loved ones. Mr. Coloney left the plantation three days previous to meet her, and as it was hardly probable he could get back in less than two weeks from the time of departure, the boys had ample opportunity to make the proposed excursion before their parents arrived.

The estate comprised three hundred acres situated on the river Mayales, about fifteen miles north of the town of Juigalpa, and within sight of the mountain range where has been found so many evidences of a highly civilized but now extinct race. To one living in this country the dwelling-house would appear very odd; it was a low, rambling building, covering as much ground as we would think necessary for forty homes, inclosed with high walls, shaded by mango-trees, and surrounded by flowers of every color, among which flitted gorgeously-hued birds.

In this charming spot the boys thought life well worth the living, even though they were deprived of any society save such as might be found within the

walls, and but for the wonderful stories, as told by Tongla, of the ruins which lay on the other side of the mountain range, Roy might not have cared to extend his hunting trip beyond sight of the plantation.

Despite all his fears Dean was forced to yield to the fascination of exploring a city whose inhabitants had passed away before the present race of people sprung into existence; but he strictly opposed any such research as would necessitate their remaining at the place during those hours when, according to the tales of the Indians, evil spirits lay in wait to entrap the stranger.

Once the expedition had been decided upon, both boys hurried forward the preparations, for there was very much to be done. It was necessary the servants should cook plenty of tortillas, mix the paste of sweetened maize, called pozol, and bake and dry totopostes.

This extra amount of labor, to be performed after the servants supposed the day's work was nearly ended, quite naturally caused considerable excitement, and before the boys had finished overhauling the weapons, Tongla, breathless and warm because of the unusual exertion of running, entered the court-yard.

"Is it quite true the young masters would visit the city beyond the range?" he asked, speaking English so imperfectly that, as Dean said, "it became an entirely different language."

"That is the exact truth, my dear boy, and you are to go with us," Roy replied, laughingly.

"But a man is not able to walk there and back to the hills before the sun sets, even though he may start at break of day."

"We can stay all night in the woods, I suppose," and Roy observed the Indian closely as he spoke.

"There where the Sukia women say the evil spirit has taken up his abode?" Tongla asked, with no attempt at disguising his fear.

"We shall stay there, although nobody believes such stories, which were concocted for the purpose of frightening children. If you want to make the trip, well and good; otherwise we can find plenty who do not place such faith in those whom you call the 'mother of tigers.' Will you go?"

"Have I ever refused to do anything which the young masters wish?"

"In the first place, Tongla, we are not your masters, and in the second you are free to act as you choose. We are going to the ruins beyond the range; if you wish to accompany us, both Dean and I will be pleased; but it'll also be perfectly satisfactory if you prefer to remain here."

"Even though the young masters refuse to say I am their servant, I shall go with them, and by their side will I be when the evil spirits hover around."

"All of which means that you do not intend to lose the chance of having lots of fun," Roy replied, laughingly. "That's where you are right, my boy, and early on the second day from this we start."

At least once each day during their eight months' sojourn on the plantation had the boys tried to teach Tongla that he should not call them "mas-

ters;" but all the labor had been in vain, despite the fact that he was hired at regular wages like the other servants; and, what made the matter seem yet more aggravating, he persisted in acting as if he was a slave.

"It is a hobby of his to fancy we own him," Dean said, after the Indian thus announced his intention of attending them whatever supposed supernatural dangers might threaten, "and I believe it would really give him pleasure if we asserted the rights of master."

"All of which is fortunate for us, so far as this excursion to the ruins is concerned. If he refused to go we might be obliged to stay at home, since he is the only guide we have any authority from father for taking."

Tongla certainly worked like a slave during the time which intervened before the party set out, and the fears of meeting with evil spirits were laid aside, so far as could be seen, in order that the proper arrangements should be made. He looked after the cooks to make sure the requisite amount of provisions were prepared; borrowed a second spear as well as a large number of arrows, that he might be ready to make a good defense in case of tangible danger, and otherwise acted as if the trip was one in which he felt the greatest interest.

There was no necessity of reminding him again that the travelers were to start at early daybreak. At the moment decided upon he awakened Roy and Dean, and the boys found breakfast already prepared. It was only necessary they should make a

hurried toilet, eat a hearty meal of fish, plantains and yams, after which there was nothing to further delay the journey.

"Now we're ready, Tongla, if you are," Roy said; "and please say to the others that we will be back in three days unless something very serious happens."

"The old Sukia woman who was here last night believes we shall be away many days," Tongla replied, gravely. "It is not allowed that white men may see the mysteries of Kucimen."

"Since we are only boys, perhaps there'll be an exception made in our favor," Dean replied, with a laugh, the Indian's fears apparently reviving his own courage. "But whatever is going to happen we can't loaf around here very much longer, or it will be impossible to reach those famous ruins before dark."

From this moment it seemed as if Tongla banished all his fears; he hesitated no longer, and when the others would have delayed urged them forward cheerily.

During the first three or four hours the young travelers followed a course nearly parallel with the base of the hill which jutted out on the limits of the Coloney plantation, and through a tangled thicket where Tongla was often forced to use his machete in order to clear a path. Now and then they forded a small stream of clear water which ran over brilliantly-colored pebbles, where the boys slaked their thirst with avidity, for these mountain brooks were filled with water deliciously cold. Then the path

took an upward turn, and the fatiguing portion of the tramp was begun.

Birds of gorgeous plumage crossed their path; now and then evidences of wild hogs were seen, and more than once the Indian rabbits, or agoutis, offered tempting targets for the double-barreled fowling-pieces with which the boys were armed; but not a shot was fired. The desire to explore the ruins outweighed every thought of sport, and the fact that they had only food sufficient for the time proposed for the journey prevented any waste of ammunition.

Tongla led the way, as if impatient to arrive at the place where so much danger was to be apprehended, and not until the sun was high in the heavens would he agree to make a halt. Then it was the hour for the siesta, to which the boys had already become accustomed, and, after slinging the light but stout hammocks, to guard against an attack from snakes or venomous insects, the weary travelers gave themselves up to the luxury of slumber.

The afternoon was nearly half spent when Tongla awakened his companions as he said:

"If you would see the walls of the silent city before dark it is time we were walking."

"We not only want to see them, but propose to enter this very evening," Roy cried as he sprung to his feet.

"It will not be possible to do that until to-morrow," the Indian boy replied. "Too much time has been spent in slumber."

Roy understood that Tongla had allowed them to sleep until it was too late to reach the ruins that evening, and he would have made an angry reply but for Dean, who whispered:

"There is no use in showing anger now. He, like me, is afraid to go there after dark, and nothing you may say can mend matters. We'll make a camp at the base of the hill, and by sunrise start again."

This was very good advice, since it was absolutely impossible to do anything else, and once more the boys followed their guide across the mountain spur, making no halt until the shadows of night were merged into gloom, when Tongla stopped beside a small stream as he said:

"It is here we sleep. The city is among the trees more than three miles away, and you shall see it when the sun rises once again."

The boys were decidedly disappointed at being forced to come to a halt while yet so far from their destination; but as Tongla had arranged the matter, they could do nothing but make their camp in this very convenient place.

With an armful of leaves from the banana-plant the Indian boy built a shelter which would at least serve to protect them from the dew, and a huge camp-fire was kindled in front to frighten away the wild beasts and monkeys—these last animals being feared more than the first, because of their power to do so much mischief.

Camping out in Nicaragua is not as pleasant as in very many other places, because of the number of creeping things which seem to have been made for

the especial purpose of causing a human being discomfort; but Roy and Dean were sufficiently well acquainted with the country to adopt all needful precautions, and after a supper of totopostes, washed down with water from the brook, they clambered into the hammocks for the needed rest.

It had been arranged that Tongla should remain on watch during a third of the night, the others relieving him in turn; but this was hardly looked upon as labor since it was only required to keep the fire alive, and even this did not necessitate the cutting of fuel, for the dye-wood choppers had left chips enough in the vicinity to feed the flames many hours.

CHAPTER II.

IN CAMP.

THIS WAS the first extended tramp Roy and Dean had taken among the forests of Nicaragua, and both were sadly disappointed because there had been such a dearth of adventure.

"We've seen small game enough," Roy said as they swung to and fro in their hammocks, "but so far as anything else is concerned we might as well have been in the Adirondacks."

"What did you expect?" Dean asked with a laugh.

"I would have felt satisfied with a drove of wild hogs—warees, Tongla calls them."

"No, no," the Indian boy said, quickly; "we do not want the warees. Too many come together, and it is dangerous to meet them."

"I'd like to see one or two, at all events," Roy replied; and Tongla shrugged his shoulders as if to intimate that he had no such foolish desire.

"How far are we from the ruins?" Dean asked when the Indian showed that he was interested only in keeping at a respectful distance from the wild hogs.

"One hour after sunrise to-morrow we shall be there, if all goes well to-night."

"I fancy it is safe to say nothing very serious will happen to-night," Roy said, as he closed his eyes preparatory to indulging in slumber.

Dean was rapidly losing his fear of the ruins because their journey thus far had been so uneventful, and, believing what his brother said, was about to follow the latter's example, when Tongla leaped to his feet with every appearance of most intense fear.

Jumping from the hammock, Roy seized his gun and pressed close to the Indian's side; but the latter motioned for him to move back into the thicket

"What's the matter?" Dean asked nervously as, arming himself, he joined his companions.

"Hist! Do not speak, lest the eyes of the Sukia woman fall upon us and prevent us from ever leaving this place. Go back into the thicket, where you cannot be seen."

"What good will that do? The light of the fire shows where we are."

"I shall remain; the Sukia does not harm one of her own race. Hide before it is too late!"

The boy displayed so much fear that Roy and Dean could do no less than obey his wishes, even though the alleged danger of a glance from an old witch's eyes had no terrors for them. They crept into the underbrush where it would be possible to see all that took place, and watched eagerly for the form which Tongla thought so terrible.

During the conversation, and for several moments after the boys were hidden, nothing save the usual night-sounds of the forest could be heard, and those in hiding were beginning to believe their companion

had been mistaken, when a low, wailing cry or song rose and fell on the air, as if from a very great distance.

"They are not coming this way," Dean Whispered. "Tongla has heard so much about Sukias that he gets frightened at his own shadow. I believe that noise is made by a bird."

"He doesn't think so," and Roy pointed to where the Indian boy stood silent and motionless save for a slight swaying of his body to and fro, gazing out into the gloom like one fascinated by some horrible sight.

Nearer and nearer the wailing cry approached until there could no longer be any question but that it was made by human beings. Now and then a sharp scream, as if caused by intense pain, mingled with the weird sounds, making the general effect decidedly terrifying to one of weak nerves.

Nearly ten minutes elapsed before those in the thicket could see the approaching party, and then there passed within a few feet of the fire, as if unconscious of its nearness, a wrinkled old crone, clad in a single garment of white, which left the shriveled arms exposed. She it was who chanted the dismal song as she waved her hands to and fro; and immediately behind followed a party of natives, all reeling as if drunk, and occasionally giving vent to cries, as if in pain.

They marched straight onward, looking neither to the right nor the left, much as if under the influence of some drug, and the statue-like Tongla was unheeded, evidently to his great relief.

When the unpleasant-looking procession disappeared in the black forest, Roy and Dean would have come from their hiding-place, but the Indian boy's quick ear caught the rustling of the leaves as they arose, and he whispered, hoarsely:

"Go back, if you wish to live! Remain there until the voices of those who speak with the gods can no longer be heard."

"He will certainly die of fright if we venture to disobey," Roy said to his brother. "We may as well stay here a few minutes longer; but so far as our lives are in danger, that is all nonsense. I'd as soon meet the entire disreputable party if I had my gun."

"They must be able to work some harm, for there isn't an Indian on the plantation who would willingly pass a Sukia woman when she marches out at night with some of her most promising followers."

"I wonder where they are bound?"

"To the ruins, most likely; and if that is the case, we shall have hard work to make Tongla go where we wish."

"Then we'll stay here until the orgy is finished, and after that he can't object."

"I would like to have followed on behind and seen the performance."

"And you are the same fellow who was afraid to stay at the ruins all night," Roy said, laughingly. "What has made you so bold?"

"That crowd. Now I've seen what the ministers to the supposed spirits look like, there isn't anything so very terrible to Tongla's stories; for, ac-

cording to the appearance of him, this is about the worst of the whole matter."

By this time the wailing chant had died away in the distance. The Indian boy's rigid form seemed to relax, and motioning for his companions to come from the thicket, he began to replenish the fire, which had burned itself out until only a few smoldering embers remained.

"Well, Tongla, what was all that fuss about?" Roy asked, as he busied himself with preparing a pot of chocolate—a beverage which in Nicaragua is drank at all hours of the day or night.

"The Sukia is about to speak with the gods; we must turn back, or death is certain."

"Have they gone to the ruins you intended to show us?"

"Much further than that. Up the other side of the range many leagues."

"Then what is to prevent our doing as we proposed? We sha'n't interfere with them."

"It is not allowed."

"Who will prevent us?" Dean asked, impatiently.

"It is not allowed," Tongla repeated; nor would he make any other answer, despite the many questions with which the boys plied him.

After trying in vain to learn the meaning of his words, Roy said, sharply:

"Listen to me, Tongla, and remember that I speak only the truth. These gods which you tell about are only images of stone, and can harm no one. Those old mummers who passed here are no stronger than you, and if the whole crowd stared at

us for twenty-four hours there would be no damage done. Dean and I are going to the ruins when it shall be light enough to admit of our seeing the way. If you choose to come, well and good; otherwise we'll separate here, and you can go home to say why we were left without a guide."

"Turn back now, and next week I will come with you, when we can stay two, three or four days, even, in the hall of the gods, if you wish."

"The indigo-vats will be filled then, and you know very well we can't get off. Now the ruins are but an hour's journey away, and I am going to see them."

The Indian remained silent, and after repeating his determination to see them on the following day, Roy said to his brother:

"We will go to sleep now. Tongla can awaken us when he gets tired of watching, and there are not many hours left for rest."

The boy remained silent by the fire as his white companions clambered into the hammocks, and when they opened their eyes as the first rays of the rising sun lighted up the recesses of the forest he was in the same position.

"Why didn't you call one of us?" Roy asked as he sprung to his feet. "There was no reason why you should do all the watching."

"Sleep comes not when one is near death," Tongla replied, solemnly.

"Then you must be expecting to get the fever, for just now there are no signs of death in your face. Tell the steward to give you a dose of quinine, and

we shall be back before you have time to be very sick."

"I shall not return to the plantation. If the young masters refuse to go I must remain with them."

"That is a matter which shall be settled to suit yourself. We are certainly going to the ruins, but you are at liberty to turn back."

"It is not allowed, but I shall go," Tongla replied, moodily; and then he refused to speak another word.

"Let him alone," Roy whispered, as Dean was about to make some remark. "He'll get over it after awhile, and laugh at his foolish fears before we reach home. Let's turn to and get breakfast quickly, for we mustn't spend too much time here."

But few moments were required to prepare the morning meal, and then the travelers started; but now Tongla took up his position in the rear, directing Roy from time to time how to proceed.

"Why don't you go ahead?" Dean asked.

"It is my duty to follow, but I will not be the one to lead others into forbidden places," the Indian replied, gloomily.

The path now led through the dense portion of the forest, where it was often necessary for Roy to use his machete in order to clear a path among the tangled vines, and after half an hour of this laborious traveling they ascended a small but steep hill, on the very top of which stood the ruins of a colossal building. Because of having come upon the glistening stones so suddenly they seemed even larger than

really was the fact, and the boys stood, as if spell-bound, gazing at the massive pillars of an enormous gallery.

"Why, it's a regular palace!" Dean exclaimed as he forced his way through the underbrush; and Roy following, they found themselves in front of an edifice fully three hundred feet square, of which the first and second stories yet remained virtually intact. In the front was the broad veranda or gallery, and leading from it could be seen a large number of spacious apartments half-filled with vines and creepers, and tenanted only by bats and scorpions.

"There's no need of building a camp while such a place as this is near," Dean said enthusiastically as he looked in at first one and then another of the rooms, composed entirely of marble, and decorated with forms beautiful and grotesque, hewn from the white stone. "Before we left home I heard of the buried cities of Central America, but never imagined they were anything like this. We should have staid here last night, instead of camping under a few plantain-leaves. With our two guns we could hold a regiment of Sukia women at bay."

"Then you don't have any objections to sleeping here?" Roy asked, with a smile.

"Why should I have? This building is much finer than our hacienda, and we could stay a month without fear of being molested."

"Then suppose we clear out one of these rooms and make preparations for spending the night? I want to see the other buildings before we leave, for

father said there were very many. Where is Tongla?"

Until this moment Dean supposed the Indian boy was close at their heels, but on looking around no sign could be seen of him.

"Where are you?" he called, and from the foot of the hill came the reply:

"Here, waiting until you have seen the forbidden place. It is not for me to enter there."

"Nonsense!" Roy cried, sharply. "We have concluded to stay until morning, and want your help in making one of these rooms habitable."

During fully a minute not a word was spoken, and then Tongla appeared, looking very much frightened, but yet determined to do his full share of the work.

"Don't be foolish, but help us set matters to rights," Dean said, as he attacked a huge bunch of weeds which covered fully one-half of the chamber floor. "We are going to sleep here to-night, and these things must be cleared away, otherwise the scorpions will have full play, which won't be pleasant for us."

It was as if Tongla had waited to be commanded before doing anything to aid his companions, for after Dean thus peremptorily summoned him to assist, not a word of disapproval was heard. He labored as if his comfort depended upon the arrangements made, and only ceased when Roy insisted that it was useless to do anything more. Then the room presented a very habitable appearance, and the boys deposited their knapsacks in one corner,

much as if this act was necessary to prove ownership.

"We are nicely fixed, even if it is decided that we had better stay here a week," Roy said in a tone of satisfaction, "and it will be well to look around for water."

Tongla made no reply; but one could see that this decision did not please him, although he made no verbal objection to the delay.

CHAPTER III.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

SO FAR as a shelter from the weather was concerned the boys could have found no better camping-place. The second story of the palace formed a roof above the chamber of which they had taken possession, and by moving a thin slab of marble the door-way would be closed against any animal that might frequent the ruins after nightfall. Had Tongla not exhibited so much fear Roy and Dean would have decided to remain there several days, for it appeared to be a particularly pleasant abiding-place; but under the circumstances there was no idea of staying longer than the time originally set.

When their belongings were inside the room the heat of the sun forbade any excessive labor, and all three gave themselves up to the repose of a siesta which dwellers in a tropical climate consider so necessary. The hammocks were slung, and even the Indian boy indulged in slumber until the sun had passed the meridian, when Roy aroused the party by crying:

"Come, fellows, turn out, if there is any idea of finding more ruins in this buried city! We have slept too long already and must get to work!"

Tongla aroused himself at once, built a fire on the

spacious veranda, made the chocolate, and while his companions were drinking it stood silently by, as if awaiting orders.

"Why don't you eat?" Dean asked.

"It will be time for me to do that when we are among the hills once more."

"If you could sleep so soundly, I can't see what is to prevent your having some chocolate," Dean said; but Tongla made no reply, and the boys finished their meal in silence.

"Now let's see if there are other buildings like this," Roy cried, as he leaped to his feet. "Will you come with us?" he added, turning to the Indian boy, "or do you prefer to stay here?"

Tongla nodded his head in the direction of the baggage; and, understanding that he intended to remain rather than profane the supposed sanctuary of the gods, the boys left him in the chamber as they walked swiftly down past the row of massive pillars to the white stones that marked the lines of other buildings.

The only idea in the boys' minds was to see the extent of this ancient city, and to this end they walked straight past the palace and half a dozen ruins which adjoined it until they were in what had once been a broad street, but now appeared to be little more than an avenue of bushes and tangled vines.

Surrounded as they were on every hand by the luxuriant vegetation, it was possible to see but few of the wonders of this deserted city, yet the circumscribed view was sufficient to call forth exclama-

tions of wonder and surprise. Even in the thoroughfares of New York the boys had never seen nobler buildings than these must have been before the ruthless destroyer—Time—laid his withering hand upon them; and full of silent amazement they continued on until Roy said, as he halted in front of a stately edifice, which must once have been a place of worship:

"Let's go in here. I'd like to see one of their idols."

"All right; but it's lucky Tongla didn't come with us, or he'd cried out against such a sacrilege."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't take in all the sights, more especially if we have to leave here soon on account of his fears. At all events, I'm going to know what that huge pile of stones was built for."

As he spoke Roy entered a ruin, at the further end of which a dozen marble slabs were piled, one on the other, something after the fashion of an altar, and began throwing down the crumbling stones until an exclamation of astonishment burst from his lips, causing Dean to run to his brother's side.

"Here is a regular treasure-chamber!" Roy cried, pointing to a small excavation which had been disclosed, wherein could be seen several objects of a dull yellow color. "Those images must be gold, and it looks as if they had been here a very long time."

The receptacle which had thus been opened by chance was not unlike a huge and very thick chest, and by bending over, the oddly-fashioned figures

could readily be reached; but they were very much heavier than either of the boys had supposed.

The largest, and evidently most important of the three idols—for such they undoubtedly were—was not more than twelve inches high, and had been rudely carved to represent an animal of the cat family seated on its haunches, with the head hanging low on the chest. It was about eight inches in thickness, and on attempting to lift it Roy had no longer any doubt as to the metal.

"Nothing but gold could be as heavy," he said, raising the grotesque figure with difficulty. "It weighs fully twenty pounds, and judging from our success in idol-hunting, it is decidedly more profitable than cultivating indigo."

Dean seized one of the other figures, which was almost half as heavy as the first, and represented a human being with an enormous head seated on a square throne.

For at least five minutes the boys stood gazing in silence at the valuable discovery, and heeding not the fact that two Indians, dressed similarly to those who had followed the Sukia woman on the night-march, had crept up among the foliage within half a dozen yards, watching every motion jealously. The new-comers were even more excited than the boys, and one glance at their faces could have told that they would make every effort to prevent the uncouth gods from being carried away.

"How much do you suppose these things are worth?" Dean finally asked.

"If this is pure gold, and it certainly appears to

be, there must be eight or ten thousand dollars' worth here; but don't let us stand like fools. Pick up the little fellows, and I'll carry the big one. Tongla's eyes will stick out now, if they never did before."

The idea that they might have been seen by strangers never entered the boys' minds, and they were so excited by the wonderful find that neither so much as looked back after leaving the ruined temple, otherwise the Indians, who were following cautiously, must have been seen.

Tongla's eyes did "stick out" when his companions entered with their precious load; but it was fear, not surprise, which caused it.

"Where did you find them?" he asked, in tones of alarm.

"Under a pile of stones in what must once have been a temple. It was fortunate that we did not let you prevent us from coming by the stories of what could be seen here. I'd like to be frightened in this same way every day for a week."

"Carry them back!" Tongla cried, as Roy ceased speaking. "By working hard we can bury the gods again before those who passed us last night come back!"

"You don't fancy we'd be so foolish as that," Dean replied, quickly. "If you are afraid of the crowd we can start for home at once, and by travelling all day reach there before midnight."

"Even now it may be too late to gain the range. Take the gods to their resting-place, and let us shake the dust of this city from our feet."

"Don't be foolish," Roy said, sternly. "There is nothing here to harm us, and we have no idea of throwing a fortune away. Repack the knapsacks and we will go. Forty pounds or so added to our loads will make considerable extra work; but in view of the fact that it is gold, I guess we shall be able to get through with it all right."

Thus assured that the boys really intended to carry their prizes away, Tongla's fear became painful to witness. He threw himself at their feet, begging them not to incur the displeasure of the "gods," and in every possible way exhibiting the greatest mental distress.

As may be imagined, neither Roy nor Dean were willing to abandon that which had been found; and on learning that his appeals were useless, Tongla said, as he stood erect and determined because of despair:

"I shall not leave the young masters while they thus defy the gods, because now both need the aid of friends; but it will not be possible to bear the images from here to the plantation, and we shall all perish in the attempt."

"I don't believe any such foolish thing, and am quite certain you do not. It is our intention to carry these idols home, and you may stay with us or remain to meet those who possibly will try to prevent us."

"They are here now, and it is for you to brave the anger of the gods," Tongla said as he pointed to the veranda, where could be seen two Indians, who must have overheard at least a portion of the conversation.

"The Sukia's escort has come. What reply will you make to them?"

"The same that I would to you," Roy said, boldly. "What we have found we shall keep, and if it becomes necessary our guns will make answer to any attempt at detaining us. Dean and I found idols of gold which we intend to carry home. If you or they try to prevent us we shall defend both ourselves and the treasure."

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CHAPTER IV.

BESIEGED.

ALTHOUGH Roy replied to Tongla as if he had no fears regarding any attack which the Indians might make, he was far from feeling perfectly comfortable in mind. Not knowing that he and Dean had been observed in the ruins at the time of finding the treasure, there was no thought that the Indians would demand the prizes; but the possibility of their insisting upon an immediate departure, when the idols would very likely be seen, was by no means pleasant.

The new-comers, who had halted about thirty feet away, were covered with gaudy-colored ponchos, which constituted their only clothing, and around their feet were raw-hide shoes of home manufacture, with leggings of the same material, to protect their limbs from snakes. They stood motionless as statues, as if expecting the boys would make some excuse for having visited the ruins at such a time; but neither of the three spoke. Roy and Dean remained side by side just within the door-way, while Tongla was on the veranda a few paces beyond.

During two or three moments—and the time seemed very much longer to the boys—this ominous

silence continued, and then one of the Indians spoke in a harsh tone to Tongla. The boy replied, also in his native tongue, and Roy asked, sharply:

"What does he say?"

"They want to know why we came here after seeing the Sukia woman."

"Tell him that we do not intend to interfere in his movements, nor shall he question ours!" Roy said, sternly. "Where the Sukia went we did not follow; but these ruins are free to any one who chooses to visit them."

After this was repeated, both the Indians talked for some time with Tongla, and then he turned to his companions as he said:

"They asked me if I told you that it was forbidden to come here at this time, and it would be worse than death had I told a lie. Now it is demanded that you go at once and leave behind that which was found in the ruins of the temple."

"Did you tell them we had the idols?"

"I am not a parrot, nor is it necessary any one should do so, for all which happens is known to the Sukia."

"Don't be foolish, Tongla!" and now Roy spoke angrily. "Since these men have learned about the idols, they must have seen us when we overturned the pile of stones or listened to our conversation. The main question is, What are they likely to do?"

"Everything," the Indian boy cried. "If the word is but spoken we shall not be able to leave this place, no matter how many come to help us."

It was as if Tongla's cowardice aroused Dean's

courage, and he said, holding his fowling-piece in one hand:

"With two of these, and in what will be a regular fort, the entire gang who went past last night can do us no harm. There are stone slabs enough here to barricade the door-way and window in good shape."

"But are we warranted in staying where the Indians can virtually hold us prisoners?" Roy asked, in a tone of perplexity. "Suppose we start now, while there are only two to oppose us?"

"The others cannot be far away, and it will not be safe. We had better stay under cover; they won't dare to do very much, knowing some one from the hacienda is sure to come in search of us if we are absent longer than was agreed upon."

"I fancy you are right," Roy said; and then turning to Tongla he added: "Tell the Indians that we are well armed, and shall shoot the first who dares molest us. If necessary we can remain here until those who know where we are come to our aid."

That this was not an agreeable message for the boy to deliver could be told by the deprecatory tone which he used, and from his gestures, Roy and Dean believed he tried to excuse himself for repeating the harsh words.

The men made a lengthy reply in an angry tone, after which they walked gravely toward the path by which the boys had ascended to the ruins.

"Are they going away?" Dean asked.

"Only to the brow of the hill, in order to prevent us from passing in that direction," Tongla replied,

sadly. "We have offended those who minister to the gods, and our punishment will be great. Already are the others approaching, and escape is impossible unless the sacred figures are given into the charge of the Sukia woman."

"See here, Tongla," Roy said, decidedly, "there is nothing to keep you here. We are willing you should go and make your peace; but we shall stay, and it'll be a long while before that crowd can rob us. It is gold they want, and the talk about gods is only made for effect. No one knew anything about the idols, otherwise they would have been taken away many years before this. Now, having found a large amount of treasure, and nothing which is sacred, we do not intend to be deprived of it. Dean and myself are both satisfied to have you join them."

Tongla listened in silence until Roy ceased speaking, and then with a dignity the boys had never seen him display before he said, firmly:

"I am but a poor Indian who has never seen the great world from which you came, but my heart is as true as if my skin were white. It is not possible we can depart from this place with the golden gods; but death is more pleasant than treachery. I shall remain."

From both the manner and tone it was certain the boy had fully decided upon his course of action, and the others were a little ashamed for having suggested his leaving them.

"You are a good fellow, Tongla," Roy said, as he took him by the hand, "and we won't forget this

very soon. Now put out of your mind all idea that these men, or even the Sukia woman herself, can do any more than you or I, and we'll soon be out of this scrape. Do you think the rest of the crowd are so near it would be impossible for us to give them the slip? It won't be much of a job to get past the two old redskins who are trying to blockade the path."

"To the hacienda is more than a long day's walk. Before noon they could overtake us, even though the remainder of the party are now two leagues away."

"That's a fact; and it would be pretty hard to hold our own in the woods where they could surround us without much trouble. We'll stay here for awhile, and begin work by barricading this door."

It required half an hour's severe labor to fortify the place in such a manner that it could not be taken by any ordinary assault, and then the boys felt reasonably secure. The enemy were armed only with machetes and short, spear-like clubs; therefore the two fowling-pieces would be sufficient to hold them in check, and these weapons were to be used behind the barrier of stone, where apertures had been left between the slabs.

The day was well advanced when these preparations for defense were completed, and had they been at home on the indigo plantation all three would have indulged in a siesta, for during three or four hours in the middle of the day every one sleeps, the heat rendering almost disagreeable any exercise.

Under the present circumstances, however, such indulgence was not to be thought of, and the boys seated themselves on the stone floor, where a view of the veranda as well as the forest directly in front of the ruins could be had through the loop-holes.

"They will not trouble us until nightfall," Tongla had said; but Roy believed it best to be on the alert.

"One of us might sleep, if the hammocks could be hung," he said; "but I don't fancy either cares very much about lying on this hard floor."

"I will remain on guard while you rest," the Indian boy said. "Then during the night all can watch, for at that time the servants of Kabul are certain to come for the gods."

"Who is Kabul?" Dean asked, curiously. "That is a name I never heard before."

"He is there," Tongla replied, reverentially, as he pointed toward the veranda.

The boys looked out, expecting to see one of the party which the Sukia woman had led; but to their surprise not a person was in sight.

"There," Tongla repeated; and following with their eyes his outstretched finger they saw a number of rude figures painted on the marble column directly in front of their place of refuge.

"Do you mean those queer pictures?" Roy asked.

Tongla nodded his head.

"I can't make out what they mean, except that there are about a dozen big red hands, and something which looks like a snake."

"It is Kabul, God of the Working Hand," the

Indian boy said, gravely; and Dean was quite positive he bowed in adoration before this rude symbol of a divinity.

"Have you ever seen his statue-figures—like those we found, I mean?" Roy asked.

"Very many times. He is here among the ruins, and with him are other gods whom nobody knows."

But for Tongla's reverential air the boys would have laughed outright; the idea of a crowd of gods whom "nobody knew" seemed very comical. It would have been useless to make any attempt at showing him the absurdity of idol-worship, for many times had the old priest, who visited the hacienda now and then, tried without the slightest show of success to point out his errors; and although the boy listened attentively, it could be seen that he did not believe a single statement.

"Do you know the names of the gods we found?" Roy asked, after a short pause.

"I never saw them before. Perhaps the people who built this city left them."

"Of course they did, and that is why the demand of those Indians is so absurd."

"The Sukia can take what she wants," Tongla replied, with an air of the most profound conviction; and Roy rose to his feet impatiently, thus bringing the conversation to an abrupt close.

"Let's get something to eat," he said. "I'm beginning to feel hungry, and we'd better have lunch while our enemies are quiet."

Leaving Tongla on guard, Dean joined his brother at the further corner of the chamber, where the

knapsacks had been left, and before any preparations for the meal were made a most startling fact was discovered.

"There isn't a cup of water in the canteens, and we stand a good chance of being shut up here two or three days!" Roy cried, in alarm.

"I filled both the vessels when we crossed the stream this morning," the Indian boy said.

"Yes," Dean cried, bitterly, "and I washed my hands with the contents of mine, thinking it would be easy to get more!"

"Well, it's no use to scold about what can't be helped. Unless those fellows out there change their minds before to-morrow morning we shall have to give up the idols or take the chances of fighting our way through."

"On the other side of this hill, past the ruins, is a stream. I will go there now. In an hour, when all the Sukia's followers come, it may not be possible to depart from here."

As Tongla spoke he began to clamber over the barricade; but Roy pulled him back as he said:

"If any one goes it must be me. Explain where the stream is located, and I will make the attempt."

Dean was most decidedly opposed to this plan; but one argument sufficed to convince him that desperate measures should be adopted.

"In twenty-four hours all three of us will be forced to surrender unless we have the means of quenching our thirst. By filling both canteens and the chocolate-pot the siege can be sustained, on very short allowance, three times as long. Tongla

does not understand the use of fire-arms, therefore the two who are here could easily capture him. I shall be able to hold them in check, unless more have arrived, and shall bring back the water."

"If it is yet possible to go through the ruins to the other side of the hill, why wouldn't it be best for all hands to leave here?" Dean asked. "We could easily keep out of the way in the dense forest, no matter how many should come in pursuit, and flight is preferable to remaining with every prospect of a fight, in which it will be three against eighteen or twenty."

"I'm not sure but that would be a good plan," Roy said, thoughtfully. "What do you think, Tongla?"

"Beyond is a river, and if we should cross, it would be to find ourselves in the land of the Woolwa Indians, who are not to be trusted. It is better to stay here until the end."

"Were you ever in that section of the country?"

"My people do not go there. I have never even crossed the river."

"That settles it," Roy said to his brother. "We would be foolish to take the risks of traveling in a wild section, each step carrying us further from home. I will go now, and you stand by, ready to come out in case there is a row."

"Why not let me go with you?"

"Because some one beside Tongla must stay to guard the gold."

"I will answer for the safety of the little gods," the Indian boy said, quickly. "With my machete

the entrance can be defended, at least until you return. It would be well for both to go."

Roy hesitated only an instant, and then he said:

"Very well; we mustn't waste any more time. Climb over the stones and I will pass out the canteens."

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CHAPTER V.

THE WATER-CARRIERS.

THE SLABS of stone which were piled in the door-way to a height of about seven feet were so placed that the ends on the inside projected one above another like a flight of steps, thus throwing the opposite or outer portion at such an angle that the enemy could not clamber up while making an attack.

Thus the boys had no difficulty in leaving their retreat, and on the return Tongla would be able to give the necessary aid in surmounting the obstacle. Dean went first, scrutinizing the surrounding forest and ruins closely before leaping on to the veranda, and when the vessels in which the precious liquid was to be brought had been passed out, Roy followed.

Cautiously the two proceeded down the broad platform in the direction of that portion of the ruins from which the idols had been taken, but nothing could be seen of the enemy in either direction.

"Do you suppose they have gone away?" Dean asked, in a whisper.

"No such good luck as that. The forest is so dense that they might stand within a dozen yards,

and we would be unable to see them. Knowing what the country beyond here is, I suppose the two whom we saw think there is no need of guarding this side of the hill until they get ready to close in on us."

With their guns in their hands ready for immediate use the boys continued on the full length of the veranda, then down past the ruined temple, skirted the base of fourteen or fifteen huge piles of stone which marked the site of some magnificent building, and, almost without warning, were in the gloom of such a forest as they had never seen before—enormous logwood-trees, gigantic vines, towering palms, flowers of gorgeous hues, strange plants hanging to the limbs of trees, all serving to form a most marvelous picture. Here and there a few golden shafts made their way through the foliage, lighting up the wondrous scene in the immediate vicinity, and beyond in every direction the darkness seemed profound.

Despite the dangers to which they were exposed the boys halted in silent amazement, gazing about as if bewildered by the beauty on every hand until Roy roused himself with a start.

"This won't do," he said. "It's water we have come for, and too long a delay here may shut off all chance of rejoining Tongla. Come on."

"If all the forest east of the hill is like this, I don't wonder that he didn't want to take the risk of making his way through to escape the Indians. A fellow who should get lost in these woods would have a slim chance of ever getting out."

"And it stands us in hand to walk mighty straight. He said we were to go through the forest about a hundred yards before reaching the stream. We must have come more than half that distance already."

Roy had hardly ceased speaking before he was on the bank of a brook where the vines and creepers hung in such profusion that one could not see the water until directly over it.

By bending down from a fallen tree-trunk the boys soon brought up the scanty supply which could be carried, and without further delay the return was begun.

On emerging from the bewildering forest no sounds of life were to be heard; even the animals and insects were enjoying a siesta, and the very silence caused Dean to grow suspicious.

"I don't see why Tongla should have thought it best that both of us should come when there isn't the slightest danger, unless——"

"Unless what?" Roy asked, as his brother paused.

"Well, it's a mean thing to say, but I couldn't help thinking how readily Tongla might get out of the scrape by delivering up the idols. The moment we left, a signal to the Indians would bring them to the ruins, and he could either go with them or say he was overpowered."

"He wouldn't do anything like that," Roy said, very positively; but yet he quickened his pace materially, and the boys were running when the veranda was reached.

That such suspicions were unjust was shown when they reached the door-way and found him perched on top of the slabs awaiting their arrival.

"Make haste! Give me the water and guns!" he whispered, nervously. "I have seen five or six Indians come from among the trees to look at the palace, and it must be that the Sukia woman and her followers are here."

First the canteens and pot were passed up, after which Roy stood on guard with leveled weapon as Dean handed Tongla his gun and then was helped to the top by the faithful servant, when he assumed the duties of guard until the others were in the chamber once more.

"We neither saw nor heard any one, and I wouldn't be afraid to go a dozen times," Roy said when all three were sitting in front of the loop-holes.

"It was not dangerous when you started, but now it is," Tongla replied, gravely. "At this time Indians are posted entirely around us, for they know that one visit to the stream has been made, and will prevent a second. That they have traveled during the time of their siesta shows us what may be expected. Unless help comes from the hacienda we shall be overpowered soon."

"Now don't begin again to croak," Roy said, petulantly. "I thought all that was ended when you insisted on remaining with us."

"One may tell himself the result and yet not be a coward."

"You are right, Tongla; but at the same time no

good can come of continually repeating that we are doomed."

"I shall say no more. Lie down and rest until the night comes."

Again the boys refused to take advantage of the opportunity, and a few moments later they had plenty to occupy their attention.

Unquestionably the entire party of Indians had arrived, for at half a dozen different points men could be seen passing to and fro, as if taking up positions for an attack, while four or five were directly opposite the chamber.

"I don't see any guns," Roy said, after a long scrutiny, "and it seems as if they had only such weapons as we at first surmised."

"That is true," Tongla replied. "But few of my people own any, and those who do would not carry them while engaged in the service of the gods."

"It can be nothing less than suicide for them to make an attack, and I question very much if there will be any fighting unless we are driven out of here through hunger or thirst."

"Whatever the Sukia commands they will do, even though certain death awaits every one."

"How many cartridges have you got, Dean?"

"Twenty."

"And mine bring the number up to forty-three. With that amount we should be able to make matters very uncomfortable for those gentlemen, even though they are charged only with heavy shot."

It would have been an easy thing to hit any of the Indians in sight; but neither Roy nor Dean cared to

open the battle, for the idea of shooting at a human being was terrible.

Save when the Indians moved from one point to another there was no change in the condition of affairs until after nightfall, and then the boys understood why the natives believed the ruined city was peopled with spirits.

Fire-flies, so brilliant that it was difficult to believe they were not tiny wisps of flame, darted here and there, causing the white stones to glow as if a bit of phosphorus had been passed across them. Sounds from the forest, which the listeners could attribute to no familiar cause, floated on the air; something very like a sob came at irregular intervals from the ruins, and again it was as if a plaintive voice called in an unknown or forgotten tongue. Everywhere was the appearance of life, and the dullest imagination might readily fancy that the shadowy forms of that ancient race which built the city had revisited the scenes of their lives.

"After to-night I won't say a word to Tongla for being afraid of this place," Roy whispered, as he wiped the perspiration from his face. "It wouldn't take much more of this sort of thing to make me run, no matter how many Indians there may be waiting to catch us."

"Of course there is nothing unnatural about the sounds," Dean replied, nervously; "but a fellow has mighty hard work to convince himself of that fact. I wonder if it is always like this?"

"Always," Tongla said, he having overheard the last portion of Dean's remark. "I was here once,

before you came to this country; but we could not stay. It was better to travel all night, in danger of losing our way in the forest, than remain in the home of the gods."

"An attack would be preferable to sitting here idle with such good opportunities for fancying disagreeable things," Roy said after a short pause; and almost at the same moment Dean whispered:

"They are closing in on us! I am positive I heard footsteps on the veranda, and the crowd in front are advancing."

That this was correct all three of the watchers could see a few seconds later. The Indians, who had been stationed directly opposite their place of refuge, came boldly forward until they were within a dozen yards of the barricaded door, and as they halted a perfect cloud of spears were thrown, some striking harmlessly against the pile of slabs, while the greater portion passed over into the apartment.

Sheltered as they were, the boys escaped uninjured, and before the first surprise had passed four or five men made a dash at the barrier.

"Fire!" Roy cried, "and reload as quickly as possible."

There was no time to take aim. Already had one of the men succeeded in gaining the top, and Dean discharged his weapon just in time to save Tongla from a spear-thrust.

A cry of pain was mingled with the report of Roy's gun, and during the next five minutes neither of the defenders knew exactly what was done. Shouts, screams, the sound of steel striking against

the stones as the enemy used their machetes over the top of the barricade, the reports of the fowling-pieces, and now and then, above the uproar, strains of a wild song, served to confuse the boys until the struggle seemed like some horrible nightmare.

No one knew how the battle was going, save as he himself was concerned, until the Indians withdrew as suddenly as they had come, and the most profound silence reigned.

"Well," Roy said, as he saw the enemy helping four wounded men away, "I'm glad we didn't kill any of the scoundrels, although they would have had little mercy for us if that pile of stones hadn't been quite so high. Is any one hurt?"

"The point of a spear went through my jacket and tore the sleeve out; but that was the only damage done," Dean replied. "How did you fare, Tongla?"

"I am not wounded," was the low-spoken answer, "but it is yet too early to count the loss. The Sukia's followers will soon return, and we must be prepared for the second struggle."

"You're right, my boy. Our guns are reloaded, and it won't be a bad idea to gather up these spears; it seems as if the floor was covered with them."

Then Roy began collecting the weapons which had been thrown during the first portion of the engagement, while Tongla busied himself with pushing back into place such slabs as were forced inward.

The smoke from the powder hung dense in the chamber, causing the boys to crouch low as they worked, in order to breathe without pain; and after

groping around several moments Dean asked, impatiently:

"What did you do with the water, Roy? My throat is so dry that I can hardly speak."

"I put the canteens in the corner, and the chocolate-pot a little this side. Give me a drink when you find it."

Dean was silent for a moment, and then the others were startled by hearing him cry as if in pain.

"What's the matter? Have you run across a scorpion?"

"Look!" And Dean advanced toward the door, where the faint light which came in above the barricade disclosed to the view of his startled companions two articles he held.

One was the empty pot, and the other a canteen, through which a spear had passed.

"There isn't a drop of water in either!" he exclaimed, "and it seems as if I could drink a quart without satisfying my thirst."

Tongla and Roy stood as if stupefied at this misfortune which had come upon them, and then the former groped about on the floor until the second canteen was found.

"This is yet full," he said, "and if we do no more than moisten our lips it may serve until morning."

"How could we have been so careless," Roy cried, in distress. "To put that upon which all our hopes depend where nearly every spear thrown in must reach it was the act of a fool, and I am the one on whom all the blame must fall!"

"Don't talk that way," Dean said, soothingly. "Tongla or I would have done the same thing, for it was only natural to stow them out of the way, otherwise we might have trampled on them."

All thoughts of their severe loss were dispelled at this juncture by a cry from Tongla, who had taken up his station once more at the loop-holes:

"The followers of Kabul are advancing once more, and this time the Sukia comes to give them courage!"

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CHAPTER VI.

AN OPPORTUNE DISCOVERY.

THE BOYS were at their places behind the barricade in an instant after Tongla made the unwelcome announcement, and then the Indians were so near as to be distinguished without difficulty.

As if there was nothing to be feared from the fire-arms, they remained in the open space four or five minutes while the Sukia woman chanted an appeal or an invocation, and the boys could have shot several had it not been for their horror of shedding human blood.

"If that old wretch was out of the way I am certain there would be no more fighting," Roy whispered to Dean. "It seems tough to shoot at a woman; but in this case it is absolutely necessary. The shot won't kill her, but one charge will teach a good lesson. When the crowd start toward us you look out for the men, and I'll fire at her."

Dean nodded his head, but could not reply otherwise, for this deliberate planning as to which of the party should be shot savored too much of murder, although absolutely necessary for the preservation of their own lives.

The Indians joined in the last line of the chant, and when it was ended dashed forward with wild

screams, which were probably intended to dismay the boys and strengthen their own courage.

Roy paid no attention to the yelling pack, but remained at the loop-hole from which he could command a view of the old crone, who still continued her song, and before the men were on the veranda he fired two shots.

The second struck the target, and with a wild cry of pain the Sukia ran toward the thicket, while her followers halted as if suddenly converted into statues. Then it was that Roy fancied a yet fiercer charge would be made, but in this he was happily mistaken.

The old woman continued to scream, thus showing that she was not mortally wounded, and her followers fled toward her with even more swiftness than while approaching the palace.

"What happened to the Sukia?" Tongla asked in surprise, as the assailants disappeared in a twinkling.

"I put a charge of shot in her arm, and it has saved us from a hand-to-hand fight."

The Indian boy shook his head decidedly.

"You have made a mistake. She cannot be harmed by any one of this world. The gods protect her."

"They didn't this time, and if she shows herself I'll prove that the dose can be repeated."

It was not until both Roy and Dean had told over and over again of the proposition made by the former before the advance was begun that Tongla would believe the woman could have been harmed

by the shot, and then he appeared both alarmed and perplexed.

"My people never knew of such a thing before. Even the flames pass her by, and the deadly nahuyaca—that snake from whose bite none can recover—is afraid to strike when she walks through the forest."

Now Roy and Dean understood why the Indians had abandoned the attack at the very moment when it was to be begun. They, like Tongla, believed she was invulnerable, and the wound had caused more alarm than the death of half their number would have done.

"When they come again it will be to kill us, or die in the attempt," Dean said, as if alarmed at the success of his own party.

"At all events the Sukia won't do much more singing," Roy replied; "and we've got time to prepare for the next charge."

For this purpose no very lengthy delay was needed, since everything possible had already been done. The boys moistened their parched lips from the canteen, which was but little relief when each could have drank the entire contents without fully quenching his thirst, and then they sat down at the barricade to watch for what all believed would speedily come.

Again the weird noises from the forest and ruins were heard; but the Indians made no sign. Hour succeeded hour until the pale whisks of light in the sky told that night was abdicating in favor of day, and a great hope sprung up in Dean's breast.

"Perhaps they have gone away," he whispered. "Knowing that we could wound her whom they believed proof against all harm, the whole crowd may have sneaked off."

"There is no hope of that," Tongla replied, gravely. "Those who so much as touch her when she comes to visit the gods are put to death; therefore greater must be our punishment."

"When they have killed us there can be nothing worse," Roy said, smiling at Tongla's remark.

"A blow from a machete is more merciful than other forms of death that can be inflicted in the forest;" and with these ominous words the Indian boy relapsed into silence.

"They must get at us before anything can be done, and a fellow holds out pretty long with such a prospect before him," Roy said, after a short pause. "I'm going to have one more swallow of water, even if it is the last."

Never before did it seem as if a canteen had been emptied so rapidly. Although the boys hardly moistened their lips four times during the night, the contents were nearly consumed, and when Dean placed the vessel carefully in the corner, under the window, it was with the knowledge that no more than two mouthfuls for each remained.

Day breaks quickly in the tropics. It was but a few moments after the first shafts of light were seen before the sun had risen, and the surrounding forest was alive with life in varied forms. Humming-birds, with plumage so vivid in color that it was as if each feather had been set with glittering

stones, flitted to and fro past the veranda. Green and purple dragon-flies caused the massive columns to appear as if incrusted with jewels. The song of birds came from the deep recesses of the woods, and all nature seemed rejoicing at the birth of another day.

It was to none of these beautiful sights that the besieged first glanced when it became possible to see surrounding objects. Their eyes roved to and fro searching for the enemy, and nearly all were soon found.

Stationed at different points, in a half-circle, were the Indians, watching for any movement on the part of the boys, and from their attitude Roy fancied he could read their determination to remain on duty until those who had seized the idols should be starved into surrender.

"They will not fight, but wait," Tongla said, when the scrutiny was ended; and then he began overhauling the stock of provisions for breakfast. "We can eat, though it is not well to take much because of the thirst which is certain to follow."

The desire for water was already so great that neither Roy nor Dean felt the pangs of hunger, and both refused to join in the repast.

When Tongla had eaten sparingly he again advised his companions to sleep, and this time they did as he requested, for in slumber thirst could be forgotten.

Lying on the stone floor, they soon closed their eyes; but even in dreams the one want made itself felt; and at midday, when all nature seemed to be

indulging in a siesta, the intense heat awakened them. The dark forest looked cool and inviting, while in the chamber not the slightest breath of moving air could find its way, and the heat was almost unbearable.

"There is just about one mouthful of water for each of us," Dean said as he rose to his feet and seized the canteen. "It will do no good to wait, and after my share has been drank I can be no worse off. Let's pour this into the pot, where it can be divided."

The others came toward him. By using the lower portion of the shattered canteen it was possible to measure the precious liquid, and each sipped his allowance slowly, that the poor pleasure might be prolonged.

However slow their movements, the small supply was soon consumed, and Dean said, as he drained the last drop:

"The question now is whether we can hold out until morning? That will be the utmost limit; and then, if help does not come, we must give up the gold, regardless of how much money it may represent. I'd be willing to surrender now, in order that I might bury my head in that stream."

"It is too late for surrender," Tongla said, gloomily. "After what has been done, the followers of Kabul will not allow us to leave here alive."

"Do you mean that they won't let us go if we give up the idols?" Dean asked; and incredulity was so apparent in his tones that instead of replying Tongla said, sharply:

"Give me the white cloth you carry in your pocket."

Roy gave him his handkerchief, and he sprung upon the pile of stones, waving it until one of the sentinels advanced a few paces, and shouted in his native tongue.

"I will now ask the question," Tongla said; and for some moments he talked rapidly with the Indian, who shook his head while replying, after which he disappeared among the foliage.

"He has gone to consult with the others," Tongla said as he remained on the barricade. "We shall have an answer soon. Are you willing to give up the golden gods if they permit us to go unharmed?"

"Yes, yes!" Dean replied; but Roy was not so impetuous. He thought the matter over calmly, and there could be but one result to his deliberations. Thirst would soon drive them out, and life was more precious than gold.

"We will surrender them," he said, just as the Indian appeared.

The answer of the besiegers was very brief. Half a dozen words were spoken, and Tongla's voice trembled as he translated them.

"One shall go free, but two must die!"

The boys stood as if stunned. Until this moment both Roy and Dean believed they could purchase freedom by surrendering the treasure. The reply seemed to deprive them of the small remnant of courage left, and neither spoke until after Tongla said, in low, firm tones:

"I will be one of the two."

"If they would allow us to go in consideration of our giving only you up, we should not think of accepting. We will live or die together. Say to that fellow that we are determined to fight until the last moment, and more than one of them shall go before us."

Tongla repeated the words. The Indian made no reply, but retreated once more to the welcome shade of the trees, and as the Indian boy descended from the barricade the little party resumed their task of watching.

"There is no question but that they can soon wind up this affair," Roy said, quietly. "When it is impossible to stay here any longer we will make a rush, and settle while fighting. If we could dispose of the idols so the villains wouldn't find them I'd be better satisfied."

While speaking he brought from the corner, where they had remained almost unnoticed after the moment when the Indians appeared, the three figures of gold, placing them as if on exhibition.

Tongla hardly glanced at the images, but looking around the room replied:

"There is nothing we can do except watch. Work is better than idleness. If a stone was taken from the floor we could bury the gods beneath it."

"That's a grand idea!" Roy exclaimed. "Anything is preferable to sitting still, and one at the loop-holes will be enough. Stay here, Dean, while Tongla and I begin the job."

Upon surveying the huge blocks which formed the lower portion of the chamber the task seemed

impossible; but the Indian boy set about it resolutely, after selecting the smallest. With his machete he first worked along the edges, trying to find a point where sufficient of the stone could be crumbled away to admit of using the weapon as a lever, and Roy did the same, each moving in an opposite direction until they met at the end toward the wall.

Here for an instant the weight of both was on one corner, and suddenly the huge block began to turn downward, as if on a pivot.

"It's dropping!" Roy cried, and would have leaped off but that Tongla held him firmly until the movement ceased, when the latter cried to Dean:

"Bring here one of the guns! We have found a way of escape!"

Now Roy could see that as one end sunk the other rose, therefore it was not an accident, and he literally trembled with excitement as his brother tried to prop up the highest end of the block.

"Brace the gun under it!" he said, nervously. "You can hold it in that way until Tongla and I find something better."

With the butt of the weapon pressed firmly against the edge of the solid flooring, and the muzzle just beneath the lifted rock, Dean succeeded in doing as he was bidden, and in a few moments the other two had completed the work with their machetes.

There was now an aperture the entire width of the block and about three feet high, through which either of the boys could pass without difficulty; but

before venturing below, it would be necessary to ascertain what was underneath.

Tongla gathered bits of branches from the corners where the room had not been thoroughly cleaned, and holding these tightly together, asked Roy to light a match.

It was by no means a good torch, but would serve to give at least a glimpse of where the opening led to, and the little party crouched close by the edge as he lowered the feeble flame.

No one thought there might be any danger in thus forsaking the loop-holes, and neither would probably have heard the approach of a dozen men had they come at this moment when was to be decided the value or uselessness of this discovery.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TUNNEL.

THANKS to the light of the improvised torch, it was possible for the boys to see, after the foul air had ascended sufficiently to permit of the flame, what appeared to be a flight of stone steps, and Dean would have started down at once but for Tongla, who said, as he held the former back:

"We do not know yet where this may lead, and it is not safe that more than one should take the risk of going. You and your brother are needed to guard the chamber; I will discover the secret and return to tell you."

Roy was on the point of insisting that some one should accompany him because of the possible danger; but he held his peace when the thought came to his mind that the Indian boy could be in no greater peril than those who remained behind.

First gathering all the materials for a torch which could be found, and then arming himself only with a machete, Tongla descended.

"Be careful!" Roy called after him, and from the gloom came the reply:

"Be watchful! The followers of Kabul may have an idea of what is being done, and choose this time to make an attack!"

"If things turn out as now seem probable we sha'n't fear them much longer," Dean said, gleefully, as he resumed the duties of sentinel by seating himself in front of one of the loop-holes.

"They may come before we are ready unless we keep sharp watch, and now there is but one gun to hold them in check. To let them know that there is no idea of surrendering, it will be well to fire at every one who shows himself."

"I don't see any but that old fellow with whom Tongla talked, and he is so far away that it would be a waste of ammunition to shoot at him."

"Take the gun. I'm going to get things ready for a quick move in case that hole turns out to be a regular tunnel."

Then Roy began to gather up the stock of provisions, which he placed in one of the knapsacks together with the smallest idol, and in the other he packed the two remaining golden figures. The chocolate-pot, canteen, hammocks, and such articles, were piled near the aperture where they could readily be gotten at, and everything was prepared for the flight in case Tongla brought back a favorable report.

"Any signs of a movement among the villains?" he asked, on approaching his brother.

"None. They are waiting until it grows cooler, or perhaps think there is no need of fighting when we must necessarily be starved out so soon. Asking for terms of surrender showed to what straits we were reduced."

"So much the better for us, since it gives plenty

of time for an examination of the tunnel. It seems to me that Tongla is staying a long while."

"That's proof the excavation is something more than a hole in the ground," Dean replied, cheerily, for the chances of escape now seemed so good that thirst and even the fear of death were at least partially banished from his mind.

The boys waited and watched fully half an hour more, and then Tongla appeared, breathing hard, like one who has been running.

"What did you find?" his companions asked in chorus, and growing pale through fear that their new-born hopes might be dashed by his report.

"It extends a long distance, but in which direction I cannot say. It will be possible to live there as many hours as if we remained here, therefore it is well to leave this place without delay."

"We are all ready," and Dean picked up one of the knapsacks as if to descend at once, when the boy said, stepping toward the barricade:

"There is very much to be done here first, otherwise the enemy will follow us. When this stone is dropped the cracks can tell the story; and, besides, we need torches."

"I don't see how you will get them; and as for the stone, that can't be helped. We shall be no worse off, if they come, than here after our ammunition is exhausted," Roy said.

"All can be arranged if you do as I wish."

"Give your orders, and we'll obey; but work quick, or there'll be another fight on our hands."

"Go on the pile of stones with your gun, that

they may not be able to prevent my coming back;" and as Tongla spoke, he ran swiftly up the barricade and leaped over, greatly to the surprise and alarm of his companions.

Seizing the fowling-piece, Roy followed to the top of the slabs, and there he saw the reason for this singular maneuver.

On the veranda at either side of the entrance to the apartment in which the boys had taken refuge was a quantity of twigs and broken branches, while twined around each column were a profusion of vines. These twigs Tongla gathered and threw over the barricade, working rapidly, as one naturally would, knowing that a vengeful enemy might attack him at any moment.

In fact the Indians began to show signs of activity the instant the boys appeared above the slabs. From every point at which sentinels had been stationed men sprung out from the bushes; but on seeing that Tongla was making no effort to run away, and perhaps deterred by the sight of Roy's gun, they remained at a distance, ready to run forward if any threatening movement was indulged in.

Thus the boy had ample opportunity to gather a plentiful supply of wood; and, in addition, he pulled down or chopped off huge bunches of vines.

"Now help me up," he said, extending his hand to Roy; and in another instant he was inside the chamber binding the branches into torches with the pliable vines, the others keeping close watch upon the enemy meanwhile.

When twelve of these bundles had been made he

broke the remaining pieces of wood into small fragments, and with the utmost care piled them on the inclined stone, more particularly near the edges.

"Can you give me some powder?" he asked, when these preparations had been completed.

"How much do you want?"

"What I can hold in my hand."

Roy broke open two cartridges and poured out the contents, which Tongla distributed in a thin line around the edge of the floor adjoining the movable stone. Over all he placed tangled masses of the vines in such a manner that they could not be caught when the huge block was allowed to drop into its place.

"We are ready now," he said. "Throw down the goods which we are to carry, and then go on the stairs where it will be possible to hold up this weight when I have taken away the gun and machetes."

After one more glance outside to satisfy themselves that the Indians were not ready to make an immediate attack, the boys obeyed.

It was not difficult to reach the upper end of the block by standing on the broad stair or platform which surmounted the steps, and the united strength of both was sufficient to uphold the weight. By raising the stone a trifle Tongla was enabled to remove the weapons, and when these had been carried below he proceeded to cover their tracks as far as this trap-door was concerned.

He lighted the dry wood in half a dozen places, and, making certain it would soon be fanned into a

strong blaze, gave word for the boys to lower the block.

"Let it come down gently," he said, aiding them in the work. "If the fuel is not disturbed it will burn close to the edge of the stone, the powder must be ignited, and if all goes well, some time is certain to pass before the followers of Kabul discover how we have escaped."

The only thing which could mar the success of Tongla's plan was that the Indians might make a charge to ascertain the meaning of the smoke; but this did not seem probable, in view of the fact that they had every reason to believe it would be impossible for the boys to leave the chamber without their knowledge, and also that they were already on the point of surrendering, as shown by the proposition Tongla made.

Not until after the stone was in its place did Tongla light one of the torches, and the boys saw a flight of eight steps which led to a passage about six feet wide and eight high, the sides and top covered with what looked not unlike brick-work.

"We will walk fast, for too many torches must not be burned," Tongla said. "If there is no other opening we shall need some light by which to retrace our steps."

He led the way, holding the bundle of wood in such a manner as to economize fuel, at the same time that sufficient blaze was produced to partially light the way; and he also carried his full share of the traps.

During ten minutes the boys continued on through

the tunnel, seeing no break in the solid walls, and then they arrived at a point where two other passages led out from the main one at right-angles.

Here the Indian boy halted for an instant as if to ask which course should be pursued, and Roy said:

"It will be safer to go straight ahead. This looks like the principal tunnel, and we had better remain in it."

"Did you come through here without a light?" Dean asked; and Tongla replied:

"For a short distance the little torch showed the way; but after that expired I depended on my hands as a guide, therefore could not have come as far as this, or I would have found the other passages."

Ten minutes more elapsed, and then, as Tongla halted again, this time in a listening attitude, a cry of joy burst from Dean's lips.

He heard the musical gurgle of water, and never did such a sound seem sweeter.

Tongla stopped only long enough to satisfy himself there could be no mistake, and then he dashed on at a swift pace until the little party arrived at a chamber or break in the tunnel where was an apartment about six feet square, in the center of which was a spring of sparkling water.

The torch was flung down regardless of whether the flame was extinguished, and all three knelt on the ground, literally plunging their faces beneath the surface as they drank, paused to regain their breath, and then drank again, until it seemed as if their thirst would never be quenched.

How delicious were those first draughts! The

most expensive beverage ever concocted could not have tasted half so refreshing.

"If that don't atone for what we have suffered I am very much mistaken," Dean said, when he was finally forced to stop, because he could not swallow another mouthful. "Now if the Indians follow us we shall be able to give them a fairly good reception."

"We must not wait for them," Tongla said, quickly. "It is certain they will soon discover how we escaped, and more are sure to join them when the Sukia summons. We must leave here while there is time."

"We'll be pleased to do so if it is possible," Roy replied, laughingly. He could smile, now that the danger of immediate death had passed.

"This passage must have been built in order that those who lived in the palace might escape in times of trouble, and we shall soon be in the open air once more."

"But on which side of the hill?" Roy asked.

"That I cannot say. It is enough for us if we get beyond the ruins. The country of the Woolwas will be safer than any place east of the range."

During all this time they had been in total darkness; but now Tongla rekindled the torch, and, refreshed both in body and mind, the boys continued on through the passage in the same order as before.

Now the tunnel no longer appeared to extend in a straight line, but wound from side to side in a zigzag course, as it appeared to the boys. Once they passed a spot where the masonry was damp

with moisture, and Tongla said, as if positive his conjecture was correct:

"This is where the stream passes over. We shall find ourselves beyond the hill, and perhaps on the bank of the river."

"Then it will be necessary to make our way through the forest, of which you know nothing," Dean said, apprehensively.

"It would be better to wander there until we died than fall into the hands of Kabul's followers."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIVER.

THE FEAR that they might be forced to travel many days through the trackless forest before reaching the hacienda had a depressing effect upon the boys despite the fact of having escaped from foes more pitiless than the wild beasts, and they walked on in silence until the narrowing of the tunnel told that they were approaching the end.

Three of the torches had already been consumed, and Tongla was beginning to grow nervous lest the supply become exhausted before they arrived at the terminus.

"If we are obliged to go back, it won't be difficult to make our way in the darkness," Roy said, cheerily. "With the exception of the place where the two tunnels branch off it is a straight road, and I wouldn't be afraid to travel the entire distance without a light."

"It is not of the return that I am thinking," the boy replied. "If the enemy should come, and we found no way to leave here, torches would be of great value."

"At all events we needn't worry about that yet awhile. To escape when flight seemed impossible should be sufficient to make us very happy for one day at least."

The burdens which the boys were carrying, increased as they were by the weight of the idols, prevented them from traveling very rapidly, and twice after leaving the spring a halt was called. The tunnel grew smaller as they advanced until it was barely large enough to admit of Roy's standing erect, and when it seemed as if they could go no further it made an abrupt turn to the right, where could be seen thin rays of light, which made their way through the tangled foliage at the mouth.

"Hurra!" Roy and Dean shouted in chorus; and Tongla ran swiftly ahead, throwing down his load and the torches as he began to chop at the vines and bushes with his machete.

In five minutes an opening sufficiently large to admit of their crawling through had been made, and the fugitives stood on the bank of a swiftly-running river in the very midst of the forest. On every hand the thicket seemed to be impenetrable. Huge trees grew to the water's edge, their trunks festooned with vines whose stems were from one to three inches in diameter; while, choking all the intervening space, and shutting out even the horizon from view, were a profusion of plants with lustrous leaves not unlike and quite as large as those of the banana-tree. The boys were literally hemmed in by the rank vegetation, and with nothing in view save the dark water.

"Take care!" Tongla shouted, as Roy pressed forward in the hope of getting a more extended view from the edge of the river. "Snakes are here in plenty, and to be bitten by them means death!"

"We can't stand still, no matter how many there may be crawling around."

"Strike with your machete wherever you see what looks like a good hiding-place for them, and when you are in grass so tall that the earth cannot be seen. Do you think it is well to loiter here when even at this moment the followers of Kabul may be coming through the passage?"

"What do you advise?"

"That we go down the river a short distance, and there make a shelter in which to spend the night, for we need much rest before beginning the long journey."

"Go on. Lead the way and we will follow. A hearty meal won't come amiss, for I feel as if I hadn't had anything to eat since we left the hacienda."

Tongla made no effort to hide the trail. He knew that if the Indians should discover the tunnel they would at least understand in which direction the fugitives had gone, and it was too soon yet to spend much time trying to throw them off the scent.

Walking slowly, and striking the vines and creepers with his machete from time to time, the boy led the way toward the south within twenty feet of the river until the little party was about a mile from the outlet to the passage, when he came to a halt at a place where three logwood-trees stood very near together, in the form of a triangle.

Here the knapsacks were unstrapped, and, with the remainder of the goods, piled up in one place, after which all hands set about clearing away the

foliage. While this was being done Tongla uttered a loud exclamation of joy as he held high in the air a handful of what to his companions were ordinary weeds.

"What is it?" Dean asked in surprise, as he ceased his fatiguing labors for an instant.

"The guaco—the plant which cures the bites of all snakes save those of the deadly nahuyaca. With these, we need no longer fear to walk through the forest."

"That is all very well," Dean replied, laughingly; "but if I can prevent it there will be no chance of trying it on me, for I intend to give snakes a wide berth, as I always have done ever since we came to this queer country."

Tongla tied the precious guaco-leaves together and deposited them in one of the knapsacks with more care than he would have shown in the disposition of the golden idols, and then he went to work as if with renewed courage.

The afternoon was hardly more than half-spent when the temporary camp had been completed. The hammocks were suspended from the trees, and just above them was a roof formed of the large leaves which grew in such profusion. The river was hardly ten feet away, and near the edge of the bank Tongla cleared a spot where a fire might be built without fear of a general conflagration.

"With what food we've got on hand I don't believe there'll be much cooking done," Roy said, with a laugh. "Unless you are intending to make more tortillas, we will have a cold meal."

"I shall get meat, and you will take dinner with me."

"It is just what we would like to do; but unless you use the bow and arrows there'll be no game, for it isn't safe to discharge the guns while we are so near the tunnel."

"There shall be no noise made. Lie down to rest, and when I return we will eat."

With his bow in one hand and a machete in the other Tongla set out, moving through the foliage with the utmost caution, and when they were alone Roy suggested that some chocolate be made.

"We have had a few hours' sleep, while he hasn't closed his eyes since we arrived at the ruins, and it is but right for us to help a little."

"I'm willing to do my full share, so get the chocolate ready while I build a fire."

This task had hardly been begun when Tongla returned, literally staggering under the weight of a huge bunch of plantains, and two agouti which he had shot not more than a hundred yards from the camp.

"Well, you've got food enough to feed us a week; but how do you propose to cook it?" Roy asked, as he helped unload the young hunter.

"You shall see." And Tongla set about the task without loss of time.

He first dug a deep hole in the sand near the water, filled it with a quantity of dry wood such as could be found in abundance anywhere in the vicinity, and after setting this on fire, proceeded to dress the rabbit-like animals.

When the wood had been reduced to coals he raked them apart in the middle, wrapped the agouti in plantain-leaves, after sprinkling them with salt, and laid the whole in the fiery excavation, carefully covering them with embers.

"It will be ready in half an hour," he said.

"The whole thing will be burned up in less than that time," Dean replied, laughingly, as he made an attack upon the ripe fruit.

Satisfied that his portion of the work had been well done, Tongla laid down in his hammock and swung leisurely to and fro, enjoying the fragrant odor of the chocolate, until sufficient time had elapsed for the game to cook. Then, to the surprise of his companions, he took the roast in prime condition from the ashes. As a matter of course the outside leaves were burned; but the inner wrappings remained uninjured, and both Roy and Dean were forced to admit that they had never eaten more delicious meat.

"You shall be chief cook after this, Tongla," Roy said, as he sipped his chocolate lazily when the feast was ended, "and we will be content to act the part of assistants."

"We shall have fish to-morrow, and armadillo the day following, all prepared Indian fashion."

"Do you think we will be wandering around as long as that?" Dean asked, in surprise.

"We have yet to remain in the forest a long while. Even though the followers of Kabul were not hunting for us, it would require many days to reach the hacienda from here, unless we went by way of the

ruins, and with them to guard the passes of the range our journey will be a weary one," the Indian boy replied. "But we must not complain, since we were allowed to leave the abiding-place of the gods."

"I won't do any grumbling; but if father and mother reach the plantation before we do they will be terribly worried."

"Don't speak of that, Dean," Roy said. "Our courage will soon be gone if we keep in mind what may happen at home. We'll simply think of what's before us, and get back in the least possible time, which is all that can be done under the circumstances."

"Watch must be kept to-night," Tongla said, when his companions ceased their mournful conversation, "and I will go to sleep now in order to have my eyes open during the hours of darkness."

"Very well; but we don't intend that you shall perform the whole of that work. Each one is to do his full share."

The Indian made no reply, and a few moments later his loud, regular breathing told that he was enjoying the well-earned slumber.

Roy and Dean busied themselves by putting the camp to rights for the night. The knapsacks containing the idols were hung on the tree above Roy's hammock; the fowling-pieces rested across the lower limbs, where they could be gotten at readily; and the remainder of the outfit, including such of the plantains as were left from dinner, were disposed of in various places, where they could not be injured by reptiles or wild beasts.

When everything was arranged to their satisfaction the shadows were beginning to lengthen, and the night-sounds of the forest, similar to what had been heard while in the ruined palace, caused the boys to feel decidedly nervous.

"I suppose there are jaguars around these parts," Dean said, as he clambered into his hammock once more; "and although we are no safer up here, one can't help feeling that there is less danger."

"I have been thinking about wild beasts ever since Tongla spoke so positively about our being many days in the woods. Fowling-pieces are not exactly the sort of weapons with which to meet even a puma, sneak though he is, and we are certain to run across plenty of them in this wild portion of the country."

"Couldn't we build some kind of a boat and sail down the river a piece?"

"If Tongla intends to follow along the bank very far before striking across to the range I shall insist on making a raft, and then we can at least sleep with some degree of security."

Any reference to the direction in which they were to travel naturally led the conversation to a question as to the probable time when they could get home, and, despite Roy's desire to keep all such thoughts far from his mind, they talked of nothing else until night had fully settled down.

The sense of loneliness experienced at the ruins was here intensified; the vastness of the forest terrified them, and it was a positive relief when Tongla awoke and asked:

"Have I been asleep long?"

"It hasn't seemed such a very great while except since the sun set. Can't you take another nap? Neither Dean nor I feel like sleeping yet awhile."

"My eyes are rested, and it is time to be on guard."

Roy felt quite positive he would not sink into slumber amid such surroundings; but after an hour had passed, and the Indian boy positively refused to talk or allow his companions to do so, both the white members of the party were wrapped in blissful unconsciousness.

Tongla no longer remained stretched out at full length, but sat upright listening intently to every sound, as if expecting each instant to hear the voices of those who had been left behind at the ruins.

Suddenly a faint squeak was heard far away in the distance, and the Indian boy reached cautiously for his bow and arrows, which were twisted in the cords of his hammock. Then a grunt, such as one would have said was made by a common hog, and instantly it seemed as if from every quarter pigs of all sizes and shapes flocked toward the fugitives. Save for the absence of a tail, and a very sharp nose, they were like those seen in our farm-yards, but their behavior was entirely different.

One old fellow with long, yellow tusks, which gleamed in the moonlight, leaped upward as if to satisfy himself as to the contents of the hammocks, and then the sleepers were awakened by such a din as they had never heard before.

"What is the matter?" Roy asked, in bewilder-

ment; and then, as his eyes fell upon the grunting, squealing, leaping mass below, he added, "Why, they are hogs!"

"Warees," Tongla replied, laconically; "and it is time to have your guns ready, for if one should get hold of a hammock the struggle would be short—for us."

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CHAPTER IX.

RAFT-BUILDING.

THE BOYS could hardly have been more awkwardly situated than now, when they were called upon to defend themselves against the drove of warees. All the fighting must necessarily be done from the hammocks, and the first incautious move would precipitate the careless one to the ground, where a horrible death could not be escaped.

Roy would have opened fire regardless of the fact that the supply of ammunition had been sadly reduced during the battle at the ruins; but Tongla prevented him by saying:

"We should do no good in killing them. Twelve would take the place of each one that dropped. Remain on the alert, for the moment may come when every shot must count in defense of our lives."

After a second survey of the scene the boys realized how little execution they could do among such a number. The ground appeared to be actually alive with hogs, while hundreds among the foliage were fighting to gain admittance to the space which had been cleared between the trees. They were so numerous that not a few were literally pressed upward on the backs of their fellows, thus bringing them so much nearer the hammocks.

Half a dozen times did Tongla, leaning over, with his legs twined firmly around the cords, strike with his machete, and at each blow the other animals seized upon the wounded one, tearing him into shreds almost before his last squeal had died away.

Roy and Dean were eager to join in this kind of attack; but the Indian boy peremptorily insisted that they remain passive.

"You are not able yet to use the machete with skill, and to fail of a stroke would be fatal. If the hammock should turn under you, all would be over."

There was little need to tell the boys this, for even in their efforts to see what their companion was doing, it became difficult to prevent being thrown out.

Roy noticed that Tongla did not dare to strike save when the target was presented fairly, and in such a manner that there was no possibility of sinking the weapon so deep that it could be pulled from his hands.

How long this singular attack lasted none of the boys could say with any degree of accuracy. It seemed, however, as if many hours elapsed before detachments of the animals began to move away. As fast as one drove, wearied with their vain exertions, left the cleared space to seek a more promising place for obtaining food, another took their place, and thus the useless battle was waged until nearly daybreak.

During that time Tongla had wounded not less than twenty of the hogs, and nothing save the bones served to show that any had fallen.

It was with the most intense relief that the boys heard the grunting of the last drove as they plunged into the underbrush squealing in baffled rage, and Dean said, as he drew a long breath expressive of satisfaction:

"I began to think they would never get discouraged. It was luck for us that a jaguar didn't happen along while those hogs were dancing so near."

"The jaguar never comes when he hears the warees. Before he could kill one the others would eat him," Tongla replied in his usual sedate manner. "Will you sleep now?"

"I should as soon think of singing," Roy said, quickly. "After five or six hours of such experience a fellow's eyes are propped wide open. It can't be very long before sunrise, and let's decide upon what is to be done when daylight comes. How far do you propose to go down the river before trying to cross the range?"

"To the land of the Rama Indians, where is a pass to the Poderoso river. From there to the lake we shall be among friends, and it will be easy to reach the Coloney plantation."

"How long will it take?"

"Ten days if we walk rapidly, and are not stopped by the Woolwas."

"Then it will be much better to build a raft. It won't delay us more than one day, and by anchoring we can sleep on board with some little degree of comfort compared to such lodgings as these, where hogs and mosquitoes congregate in equal numbers."

"It might be well," Tongla replied, doubtfully;

"but there are many dangers to be met on the water."

"I'll answer for it they can't be as great as on the land, where wild beasts and snakes threaten a fellow at every step. With forty pounds of gold to carry, our luggage is pretty heavy through this matted foliage."

"We will begin work on the raft when the day appears; but it is not certain the followers of Kabul are beyond sound of our machetes."

"Such trees as we need can be cut down the first thing, and after that there will be very little reason for making a noise."

It was not necessary to remain long idle. In less than an hour the day began to break, and the instant it was light enough to see surrounding objects clearly all the party were at work. A breakfast of plantains sufficed, in view of the fact that the enemy from the ruins might be in close pursuit; and, using the machetes as axes, the boys felled ten palm-trees, cutting the trunks into twelve-foot lengths.

Many times while this work was in progress did Tongla go back toward the outlet of the tunnel to learn whether any one was in the vicinity, and on each occasion his report was the same:

"They have not come yet; it must be that our flight is yet undiscovered."

"Probably all hands are sitting around the ruins waiting to starve us out," Roy said, laughingly; and then he and Dean gathered vines to be used as ropes while Tongla lashed the logs together.

There was no thought of indulging in a siesta.

The work must be finished in the least possible time, and despite the intense heat which threatened to overpower them, as well as the vast clouds of mosquitoes whose skill in blood-letting never diminished, each member of the party labored industriously.

It was yet an hour before nightfall when the frail craft floated near the bank, fastened by its hawser of twisted vines, and the fugitives prepared to go on board for the night.

The raft was twelve feet square, with an upright at either corner to which the hammocks could be slung, and in the middle a quantity of earth whereon a fire might be built without fear of destroying the timbers. A large pile of fuel was heaped beside it, not expressly for cooking purposes, but in order to raise a smoke as a check to the blood-thirsty mosquitoes.

The knapsacks containing the idols were lashed securely to one of the uprights; the remainder of the traps were deposited on various portions of the craft in such a manner as to keep her in trim; Tongla procured another bunch of plantains, and everything was in readiness for departure.

"We'll let her drift half an hour or so, and then anchor where the current does not run too strong," Roy said, as he seized one of the poles which had been cut for the purpose of guiding the clumsy craft.

Dean joined his brother, Tongla looked around once more to make sure nothing had been left behind, and the hawser was cast off.

The raft drifted at the rate of about two miles an hour, which was quite as fast as the boys could have walked with their burdens through the matted foliage, and for the first time since learning how long a distance lay before them, Roy and Dean began to believe the distance might be safely traversed.

It was not allowed them to remain idle; prudence demanded that the frail craft should be kept so near the bank that they could land whenever it became necessary, and to do this the raft must be guided in a certain degree. Each of the voyagers used his pole whenever the collection of logs veered too far from the shore, and a few minutes before sunset, having arrived opposite a small cove, the raft was forced in beyond the influence of the current.

It was a safe place in which to pass the night, so far as ability to gain the land in case of a sudden storm was concerned; but the insect life told that the voyagers' slumbers would not be undisturbed, for, as Dean said, "Everything with wings and stings came to welcome them."

Tongla built a fire on the mound of earth, after the raft had been anchored, and by sprinkling the embers with water from time to time a dense smoke was raised, in which the boys found some little relief while eating the supper of plantains and tortillas.

"There's one big satisfaction," Roy said, determined to extract all the comfort possible from a very disagreeable position; "we can't be attacked by warees while lying here, and there is no danger of running across snakes, jaguars or pumas."

"I believe these mosquitoes bite right through my clothes," Dean added, as he flourished vigorously the branch of a tree, such as all were using to brush off the pests. "People who complain of the number to be found in Jersey should come here awhile."

"I'm going to put——"

"Hist!" Tongla interrupted, suddenly, leaning forward in a listening attitude.

The boys followed his example, but could hear nothing until after several moments, when the sounds of voices were distinguished.

"They have come," Tongla whispered.

"Who?"

"The followers of Kabul."

"That can't be possible, or we should have heard them before leaving the shore."

"It is an hour since we started, and in that time they could have walked from the tunnel to this point."

"But if——"

"Be quiet; they are coming to the water;" and, wetting his poncho thoroughly, Tongla threw it over the fire. "Lie down, that you may not be seen."

The boys threw themselves at full length on the logs, the Indian alone raising his head, that he might hear what was said.

Nearer and nearer approached the pursuers, until the hum of voices could be heard distinctly, and then a faint glow told that the party had come to a halt.

"It'll be a fortunate thing for us if the scoundrels build much of a fire," Roy whispered to Dean, "for then there well be less chance of their seeing the raft."

"Why don't we pull up the anchor and put off?"

"We shall be obliged to do it before morning, if they stay as long; but it's a little too risky yet awhile. There is the blaze, and now we can see what is going on."

The boys raised their heads cautiously in imitation of Tongla, and saw, close by the edge of the water, a party of five men, two of whom were making preparations for roasting an armadillo. So far as could be seen their only weapons were machetes and arrows; but these would be very effective in case the fugitives should be hemmed in where flight was impossible.

The new-comers were talking rapidly, and as they pointed down the river from time to time there could be no question but that the subject of conversation was regarding the probable whereabouts of those who had carried away the golden idols.

"They know we are on the river," Tongla whispered.

"How did they find it out?"

"The signs of our work were plain enough for a child to read."

"Are you sure these men were at the ruins?"

"He who is speaking now was the one I talked with about surrendering. They do not believe we will dare to sail at night, and think to overtake us to-morrow."

"If you wish to live, work now," Tongla said, as two arrows struck the water not more than three feet away.

"Then the crowd are to start before sunrise?" Roy asked, quickly, fancying there was a chance the raft would not be discovered.

"They will stay until the day has dawned; and later, when some are wrapped in slumber, we must leave."

"And allow them to overtake us? Those fellows can travel faster than this raft will drift."

"True; but we shall try to gain the other shore, where, in a place like this, we can remain hidden until they give up the chase."

This was clearly the best and only thing which could be done under the circumstances, and the boys waited patiently until the time for action should arrive.

During fully two hours the men lounged around the fire, eating and smoking, and then one after another laid down until only the sentinel remained awake.

"Now we must start," Tongla whispered to Roy. "Pull up the anchor without making a ripple in the water, and I will begin to push off."

Dean was to aid the Indian boy, and while the two settled the poles carefully over the end nearest the shore, Roy hauled in the anchor of stones.

The crew of the raft worked silently as shadows, and the collection of logs had already begun to move from the cove, when the pole in Tongla's hands broke with a crash sufficient to awaken the sleepers.

Dropping the fragments, he sprung for the other, which Roy was just picking up; but before it could be used a harsh voice from the shore hailed them.

"If you wish to live, work now!" Tongla said, hoarsely, as two arrows struck the water not more than three feet away; but his injunction was not needed, for both Roy and Dean were fully aware of the danger which menaced them.

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CHAPTER X.

A PERILOUS TRIP.

FORTUNATE indeed was it for the boys that the Indians had built the fire; the glare of the flames prevented them from seeing the fugitives, and the great number of arrows sent immediately after the discovery were necessarily shot at random.

Now that there were but two poles remaining, Roy and Dean used one while Tongla worked with the other; and it can well be fancied all did their utmost, for after the first shower of arrows the men ran with great speed around the shore of the cove to shoot down the fugitives when the raft should pass out.

Although the craft was clumsy, her timbers were so light that the force expended sent her ahead very rapidly, and before the enemy could reach the point of the indentation she struck the current, which whirled her quickly beyond reach of the primitive weapons.

As a matter of course the poles were useless when the raft was in deep water, save as they might be worked, in a very feeble way, after the fashion of oars, and as the white members of the party ceased pushing they could not refrain from a triumphant cheer.

"We have escaped for awhile," Tongla said, with-

out any show of exultation; "but they know we must continue on down the river, and will keep pace with us until morning, when we will be at their mercy."

"I thought you were going to the other side and stay in hiding two or three days," Roy exclaimed, thinking the boy had suddenly changed his plans.

"It is what I would like to do, but unless the river carries us there we will remain in the current. The raft cannot be guided, therefore we are helpless."

This idea was intensified by the manner in which the bamboo-logs were whirled to and fro in the darkness. Not being able to see the shore, the twisting and turning of the raft appeared doubly violent, until it was as if the fugitives had suddenly been thrown upon some vast inland sea.

From the time of leaving the cove nothing was heard from the enemy; but Tongla felt certain they were following down the course of the river, and twice he cautioned his companions against speaking above a whisper, since the sound of their voices would serve to tell the pursuers where they were.

One, two hours passed, with all hands ignorant of the progress they might be making, and then Tongla, who had been using his pole as an oar rather than remain idle, said in a hoarse whisper:

"We are in shoal water, and, I believe, on the side of the river we wish to gain. Push, now, and we shall soon know if the Fates have been kind to us."

During the next ten minutes the boys worked

with a will, and then the question was decided in a manner which gave them the greatest possible pleasure. The raft had been swung to the opposite shore, and when she was firmly fixed on the sand Tongla leaped among the foliage.

"Make certain she doesn't float away while I hunt for a sheltered place in which we can remain. Everything must be arranged before daylight, or it will be too late."

Even as the remark was concluded he had started down the bank, and Roy and Dean waited with as much patience as they could command for his report.

"It's pretty tough to be obliged to stay somewhere around here when we should be traveling at our best gait toward home," the latter said, sorrowfully, and his brother replied:

"It can't be helped, and we must make the best of it. Tongla has shown himself to be in the right thus far, and it would be folly to refuse his advice. Besides, we already have good proof of what the Indians will do in order to get the idols, and at the same time punish us for wounding the Sukia woman. It would be better to stay a month rather than risk an encounter between here and the other side of the range, where they could shoot us down from the thicket."

"Of course I know all this is correct, and that we could not safely pursue any other plan; but a fellow can't help feeling badly."

"You *must* help it! If we grow discouraged, the chances of ever getting home again are very much

lessened. Try and think it is a trip of our own choosing."

"I wish I could;" and Dean spoke in such a lugubrious tone that his brother was forced to laugh, even though he felt very little like merry-making.

"I'd willingly pitch the idols overboard, regardless of their value, if it would do any good," Roy said, musingly; "but since nothing can be effected by such a course, it would be folly to throw away so much treasure."

"If we can escape from the men it will be possible to carry the gold with us, and we'll stick to it until the last moment."

"The Indians must tire of the chase in two or three days if we succeed in hiding ourselves, and either give it up entirely or search further down the river; therefore I don't think our stay here will be very long. Keep up your courage, and we will come out all right."

"I hope so," was the fervent ejaculation, and then the conversation was interrupted by Tongla's arrival.

"I do not find any cove below here," he said; "therefore it only remains for us to take the raft to pieces, for she must be completely hidden by daylight."

"Did you go up stream?" Roy asked.

"It would be useless labor to do that; for however good a harbor might be found, we could not drag the raft against the current."

"But it seems such a waste of work to take her apart after all the trouble of making her."

"Better that than a visit from the followers of Kabul, and their eyes are keen. We can use the timbers to build a house, and when the search is ended use them again. It will be necessary to work in the darkness, and no time is to be lost, for not a sound must be made after the sun has risen."

Stifling his regret because the little craft was to be destroyed, Roy began to bring their goods ashore, and Dean helped Tongla unfasten the ropes of bark, all of which were to be carried into the thicket lest by floating down stream they might disclose at least a portion of the secret.

It was by no means safe to enter the forest when the darkness was so profound that neither of the workers could have any idea what might be his path; but the Indian boy led the way, as if there was nothing to cause alarm, and the others could do no less than follow his example

Tongla would allow no loud talking, nor would he listen to Roy's proposition that they clear the ground, as had been done at the last halting-place. Selecting a spot in the immediate vicinity of some logwood-trees he formed a hut sufficiently large to shelter them at night, and strong enough to resist an attack from wild animals, unless the warees should pay them a visit.

The bamboo timbers were simply set up like an "A" tent and tied securely at the top, the bottom ends being spread about six feet. The rear of this poor apology for a hut, as well as the bottom, was closed with brush and smaller timbers, as a partial protection against visits from scorpions and such

other disagreeable creeping things, while the front remained open.

Working in the darkness, as they did, it was impossible to form a very good idea of their handiwork until after sunrise, when no one felt particularly well pleased. It was little more than a shelter, and in order to swing three hammocks it would be necessary to have them hang very near the ground.

"It will seem a little better when we cut away the foliage," Roy said, after a critical examination of the place. "We must have all that sort of stuff out before it's safe to stay very long inside, for no one knows what kind of tenants we may already have."

"That can easily be done without making any noise," Dean replied; and the three set about the task at once, for all felt the need of sleep.

Previous to this, and just about daybreak, Tongla went to the water's edge and obliterated, so far as was possible, the footprints on the sand, saying, as he returned:

"It is necessary great care should be taken when we visit the river, for the Indians may search this side, and a footprint would tell them very much."

There was yet quite an amount of the agouti roast yet remaining, and this, together with what had been brought from home and the plantains, stocked the larder plentifully for the coming twenty-four hours.

When a hearty breakfast had been eaten Roy proposed that each stand watch at some point near

the river for one hour at a time. By this means every fellow would get two hours sleep on a stretch, and by nighfall all be so far rested that, if necessary, the entire party could remain awake.

To this Tongla agreed, with the proviso that he take the first watch, and the others very willingly threw themselves in their hammocks while he began beating down the shrubs and vines in the midst of a clump of plantain-trees which overlooked the river.

When Roy was called to do his share of the guard duty he found quite a comfortable place in which to spend an hour, providing, of course, that no account is taken of the swarms of hungry mosquitoes which hung everywhere around in the immediate vicinity of the river until it was as if one looked through a veil. Tongla had cleared a spot in the midst of the plantain-trees, so far as was possible without striking any heavy blows, and the Indians' eyes would have been very sharp had they detected the sentinel while passing on a boat or raft.

"There is no fear of snakes," Tongla said, "and by trampling down the earth now and then we can prevent the scorpions from finding a hiding-place. Call me at once if you should see the followers of Kabul."

"I'll promise to do that; and now you scoop in all the sleep possible, otherwise we shall have you on our hands sick."

"It is the white men whom the fever attacks, not an Indian who has always lived in the country," Tongla replied; but he did as Roy advised without loss of time.

During the hour which followed, Roy alternately looked up and down the river, fought mosquitoes, and tramped to and fro to get the earth into proper condition. It was not particularly hard work; but he did not feel sorry to arouse Dean, for his eyes were decidedly heavy with sleep.

"You needn't speak so loud," Dean said, as his brother called him. "I have been awake for the last half hour."

"What is the matter?"

"I feel cold, and my head aches. Walking around on guard will warm me up, I reckon, and the headache comes from the excitement. Matters have been so lively that I didn't have time before to find out how tired I was."

Roy did not pay any particular attention to his brother's complaints. It seemed only reasonable that all the party should feel rather the worse for wear, and he fancied twenty-four hours of rest would work a complete change.

"You'll sleep after standing watch an hour," he said, carelessly; and as Dean walked away he laid down in the hammock, rejoicing in the thought that it would be a hundred and twenty minutes before his turn as sentinel came around again.

It seemed to Roy as if he had but just closed his eyes in slumber when Dean shook him by the shoulder.

"What's up?" he cried, springing to his feet; and there was no need to repeat the question. One glance at Dean's face was sufficient to show that the boy was very ill. He was pale, his teeth chattered

as if with the cold, and every movement betokened severe pain.

"I couldn't stay out there any longer," the poor fellow said, as he clambered into the hammock. "It's tough to shirk work, but walking didn't do any good, and I knew you'd help me through by doing a double share of watching until this queer feeling passes away."

"You ought not have staid there a single minute. I should have seen that you were not well." And Roy's face told how frightened he was, for should his brother be dangerously ill just at this time, the result could hardly fail of being fatal.

By this time Tongla was awake, and after one look at Dean he ran out of the hut without speaking, a proceeding which served to increase Roy's fears.

"Tongla is frightened, thinking it some contagious disease, and has run away," he said to himself, "while I haven't the slightest idea what to do."

Dean ceased to complain, but lay as if insensible, and his brother stood gazing at him in speechless terror.

CHAPTER XI.

FEVER AND AGUE.

ROY HAD good cause for fear. In a trackless forest, closely pursued by vengeful enemies, where nothing save the simples of the woods could be procured to arrest disease, this sudden illness seemed more like the blow of an assassin's knife than something which could be warded off. The unhappy boy was firmly convinced that Tongla had fled, and with him went all hope of finding their way back to the plantation, even should Dean recover immediately.

"If I only knew what to do!" he cried, chafing his brother's hands and covering him with everything which promised to counteract the dreadful chill.

Then the thought occurred that a cup of hot chocolate might give relief, and he began to build a fire, regardless of the fact that the smoke might be seen by those who were seeking to destroy them.

Hurriedly gathering such fragments of dry wood as could be found near the hut, he was about to start a blaze, when Tongla arrived, panting and heated, as if from rapid traveling.

"You must not do that!" the Indian boy cried, excitedly, as he scattered the pile of kindlings with

his foot. "The followers of Kabul are yet too near, and one puff of smoke would bring them upon us."

"But we can't let Dean lay there without trying in some way to aid him, no matter how many men may be around here," Roy said, petulantly.

"What were you about to do?"

"Make some chocolate and try to warm him."

"That would be of no use. He has the fever which attacks the white man, and with these we can cure him. It is not dangerous, but painful."

For the first time Roy began to understand the cause of his brother's sudden sickness. He had a severe attack of fever and ague, brought about by the night spent on the river, and the knowledge that matters were no worse caused such a revulsion of feeling that he came very near shedding tears of joy.

"Isn't there anything we can do to relieve him?" he asked.

"When his blood grows hot and greater pain comes we will give him these," and Tongla showed four small nuts which he held in his hand. "I will pound them into powder, and after an hour he will be better."

"Was it to get those that caused you to leave so suddenly?"

"Certainly. I knew why he suffered, and that the physic-nuts could alone relieve him."

"And I thought you had run away," Roy said, reproved because he had done his companion such great injustice.

"I once offered to give my life for yours; therefore you should not believe me a coward."

"That is true, Tongla, and I am sorry I so much as fancied such a thing. You have been a good friend to us, and I will never doubt again; but it did look strange to see you run away the moment we learned that Dean was ill."

"I was not certain the nuts could be found near here, and no time was to be lost, for we must keep watch lest the men come upon us unawares. I ran swiftly, that we might be together more quickly."

Having thus defended himself when no explanations were necessary, Tongla set about grinding the nuts between two stones, and before the task was finished a great change came over Dean. The sensation of chilliness had left him, and in its stead was a raging fever, accompanied by pains in every joint. The coverings were thrown off, and he tossed to and fro on the swinging bed, trying in vain to find relief.

As soon as possible after this the Indian boy administered a large dose of the powdered nuts, causing the patient to vomit violently, and when this effect passed away Dean fell into a profound sleep, during which he perspired profusely.

"To-morrow he will feel well, and on the next day be sick again; but not as he was a few moments ago. Now, if you watch the river—he is sure to be wrapped in slumber many hours—I can go hunt for cinchona-bark, with which to make the tea that cures the fever."

Convinced by the general appearance of his brother

that the illness had been dissipated in a great measure, Roy went once more to the river-bank, and Tongla vanished in the gloomy recesses of the forest.

The Indian boy returned two hours later with a handful of bark, which he showed to Roy as he said:

"The chocolate-pot must be used to boil the tea, and until your brother is well we shall drink water or palm-juice."

"I can get along without anything if the poor fellow recovers; but what do you mean by palm-juice?"

"You shall see in a few moments. It is not well to build a fire until the night comes; therefore we have plenty of time. Have you seen the enemy?"

"No one has passed up or down since I have been here, and—hello, here comes a boat from the direction of the tunnel! It may be some of the people from the plantation in search of us."

Excited by this thought, Roy would have rushed recklessly out had not Tongla forcibly restrained him, as he asked:

"Where would our friends get a canoe? The strangers are Woolwas, unless the followers of Kabul have been gathered in larger force to search for us."

Creeping as close as possible to the edge of the bank, without exposing himself to view, Tongla watched the approaching craft intently. She was manned by four men, although a dozen could have had ample accommodations in her, and instead of using their paddles the crew were drifting with the current.

Even Roy understood the reason for their coming when he observed that they were keeping careful watch of either bank, and Tongla whispered:

"The Sukia has sent them, and many days will pass before they give up the search. The raft will serve us no longer; we must seek safety in the land of the Woolwas."

"Do you mean that we are to follow the river no further?"

"Answer the question yourself. With nine men, and a boat in which to go and come as they please, is it possible for us to take passage on the raft, unless we desire to be made prisoners?"

Roy remained silent. Only by sheer force of will had he been able to preserve even the semblance of courage; and now, with Dean sick and the number of the enemy increased, he broke down. Throwing himself on the ground he gave full sway to grief, and Tongla made no attempt to cheer him until the first violence of the outburst had passed away, when he said, soothingly:

"I have heard you say that to grow disheartened is to die. The gods have not yet decreed that we must perish because of what was done at the ruined temple, else these men would have found us at once. To-morrow and the next day must be spent here, for Dean will not be able to travel; but after then we can escape to the interior, and by following the Siguia River reach the coast."

"What is to prevent our crossing while these men are out of sight, and taking our chances on the range?" Roy asked, passionately.

"Could your brother walk now? Would it be possible to guide the raft across? She would float many miles before gaining the other side, and one of the searchers must see us. If all these things were to be guarded against, there yet remain the Sukia and those who are with her to cut off our retreat. They know it is to the Coloney plantation we wish to go, and every pass will be watched. That way lies almost certain death, while here we may outwit them all."

"At the expense of falling into the hands of the Woolwas."

"Who can say that we shall not be treated like brothers among them? With the followers of Kabul they are not at peace; but will those who flee from the Sukia be injured?"

This argument was not needed to convince Roy that it would be in the highest degree unsafe to make any attempt at crossing the river, and his grief having exhausted itself, he said, earnestly:

"I won't make a fool of myself again, Tongla. It would be unwise to do other than as you propose, and we will strike into the interior as soon as Dean can walk. Are you not afraid the Indians may come back before we are ready to leave?"

"It will take two or three days to search the west bank of the river, and until that has been done we shall not be troubled," Tongla replied, in a positive tone. "Others may come down; but all believe we would try to gain the pass where the Poderoso River could be reached, as, except by way of the ruins, it is our only chance of getting to the plantation."

"Shall I watch here any longer? If you are so certain regarding the men's movements there is no need of posting sentinels."

"Go to your brother; if he is asleep, lie down and rest. I will remain here."

"But you are even more tired than I. Take another nap now, and then I'll try my hand at it."

"While you and your brother kept watch I slept, and am now refreshed."

It was in vain that Roy insisted the Indian boy should return to the hut. He positively refused to leave the bank of the river, and since it was needless for two to remain on guard, Roy joined his brother.

Dean was in a profound slumber; there was nothing to be done, and the tired boy lay down in the hammock, but not to sleep. The knowledge of their desperate situation prevented his eyes from closing, and after remaining inactive until the heat of the day had come he went to where Tongla sat, with his gaze fixed upon the swiftly running water.

"I must have finished my nap before Dean awakened me," he said, "and it is impossible to lie down any longer. If you feel like it, turn in, for I'm going to stay here until night comes."

It was quite probable that Tongla was more disturbed in mind than he was willing to admit, for he refused to take advantage of the opportunity, and both boys remained on guard until late in the afternoon, when a feeble cry from Dean caused Roy to run toward the hut.

"I was afraid something had happened when I found myself alone. Where have you been?"

"With Tongla, keeping watch. He was gone quite a while hunting for medicine which you are to take as soon as we can make it. After he got back I felt so thoroughly awake that it seemed useless to lie down. How are you by this time?"

"The pain isn't as great, but I am very thirsty. How good a glass of lemonade would taste!"

"I'll ask Tongla if you can have the water; but the lemons are a trifle beyond us. Suppose you try a plantain?"

"No, no, I only want something to drink."

Roy went to the sentinel, repeated what Dean had said, and asked if there would be any danger in giving him water.

"Let him have what he wants, and this evening I will get that which shall be as refreshing as lemons. Come back to keep watch while I am away."

Dean appeared to be perfectly satisfied the Indian boy would fulfill his promise, and after a copious draught he sunk into slumber once more, when Roy rejoined Tongla.

"Now I will get the lemonade," the latter said, as he started through the thicket after assuring himself that Roy was where he could keep the river in view.

The ripples of light on the water, the hum of insects and the low songs of birds served to make the scene one of perfect peace, and it was difficult for the watcher to keep constantly in mind the fact that lurking, perhaps in the immediate vicinity, among the trees, or sailing on the river, were men intent on deeds of blood. It was only necessary,

however, for him to glance around him to have the disagreeable fact presented very plainly, and then all beauty vanished from the picture.

Tongla was absent fully an hour, and when he returned he had half a dozen trunks of young palm-trees in his arms.

"What are you going to do with those?" Roy asked, curiously.

"Make the drink which Dean wants," the boy replied. "Watch, for it may be that some time you will wish to quench thirst in the forest when there is no water to be had."

With his knife the boy cut through the shell of the tree near the top, taking out a round piece of the wood-like outer covering as one would make a second lid for a box. Then he pushed the blade far down into the pulp or pith, and after thus wounding it replaced the section which had been removed. This done, he leaned the trunk against a tree that it might stand upright, and treated the others in the same manner.

Nearly an hour was thus occupied, and when the task was completed he cut a small, hollow reed, placing one end in the aperture first made, and motioned for Roy to drink.

To the latter's great surprise he drew in a mouthful of a rich but rather sharp-flavored liquid, sweet, delicious and decidedly invigorating.

"Why, it's the best drink I ever tasted! I believe it would be possible to empty all those reservoirs if a fellow was thirsty."

"You can drink it, and to-morrow there will be

just as much there again. Each day more flows, therefore it is not necessary to save any. Should we take none out it soon ferments, and in two weeks the cheechee is made, when a very little makes a man drunk."

"We'll take it this way," Roy cried, delightedly, "and be mighty glad of the chance. Now let's carry Dean some, for the poor fellow must be thirsty again by this time."

The invalid had just awakened when the boys reached the hut, and the eagerness with which he drank the palm-juice pleased his companions hugely.

"It seems as if the fever was driven away by it," he said, after exhausting two of the natural vessels. "Will there be any harm if I drink a great deal?"

"Have all you want; it will do you good; but in the morning we shall give you what is not so nice" And Tongla turned away to begin the work of brewing the cinchona.

CHAPTER XII.

THROUGH THE FOREST.

WHEN DEAN'S thirst had been satisfied, and Roy had gone back to the river's bank to resume the weary work of watching, Tongla set about his medicine-making with the utmost deliberation.

He first dug with his machete a deep hole in the ground where the hut would serve to hide from the river any blaze, and then filled it with dry wood. Across the top he placed two stout branches, such as would not be burned quickly, as supports for the chocolate-pot. In this latter utensil he placed the bark previously gathered, and covered it with water.

Dean had been watching the maneuvers intently, and when Tongla ceased, as if the task were accomplished, he asked:

"Is that all you're going to do?"

"When it is so dark that the smoke cannot be seen I will start the fire."

"But the flames can be seen."

"I will not allow them to come above the top of the hole, and we can also screen them with our bodies. It is not necessary the fire should be very great, as we do not care to have the water boil."

As if it pained him to remain idle, Tongla darted into the forest when he ceased speaking, and did not return until the shadows of night were beginning to gather.

Roy had just come to the hut in response to his brother's cry for more of the palm-juice, and glancing at the long strips of bark which Tongla had in his arms, he asked:

"What are you going to do with that? Make more drink for Dean?"

"It is from the mohoe-tree, and with it I shall weave hats for us all, as well as cords with which to carry the loads more easily. When one's fingers are occupied the eyes will remain open longer."

"Do you think we ought to stand watch to-night?"

"It would not be safe to sleep while so many are hunting for us. One hour in the hammock will be enough for me."

"I shall do my full share," Roy replied, "and will begin by sitting up until midnight, when you can finish the job."

"After I am rested you can go to bed," Tongla said, as if determined not to sleep half the night; and Roy made no reply, for he intended the matter should be carried out as he had arranged.

It was now time to begin brewing the medicine; and running to the river-bank once more, to satisfy himself there was no one in sight, Tongla lighted the fire. By the use of a branch, which he wet from time to time, it was not difficult to keep the flames below the edge of the excavation, and one

might have passed within twenty yards of the encampment without knowing any human being was near.

The wood was not replenished. When it had burned to coals the Indian boy removed the supports and placed the pot on the embers, saying, as he did so:

"It will cook there before morning, and to-morrow night we can build another fire to roast some meat, for the tortillas are nearly gone."

"I would like almost anything in the way of game just now," Roy said with a grimace. "A diet of corn, no matter how it is prepared, gets monotonous after awhile, and much as I dislike those little beans they call frijoles, I could eat a quart of them for the sake of a change."

"When we are away from the river it will be possible to have plenty."

"Unless the Woolwas object to our traveling across their country," Roy replied, as he took one of the despised tortillas and went slowly to stand his portion of the watch.

Dean slept peacefully. Tongla clambered into his hammock, and was soon in the same state of blissful unconsciousness, while Roy paced to and fro, listening for sounds of the enemy's approach, since it was too dark to permit of so much as a glimpse of the river.

"It isn't very jolly out here in the thick darkness," he said to himself; "but we can thank our lucky stars that this trouble occurred while the moon was in the last quarter. If she had been full

yesterday there is little chance we should have escaped from those villains."

He was beginning to learn, as so many have done before him, that even in the most dangerous situations one can always find something for which to be thankful.

Whatever Tongla may have intended to do, he certainly did not prevent Roy from standing his full half of the watch. When midnight came the Indian was still sleeping, and the sentinel aroused him with the words:

"It is time you turned out, and I'll try my chance at snoring."

"Is it twelve o'clock so soon?" Tongla asked, in surprise, as he leaped to the ground.

"Indeed it is; and I'm mighty glad, for things are not very lively out there."

"I am a fool! It was my place to do the watching, and I did not intend to sleep more than an hour."

"It is only fair to divide the work," Roy replied as he clambered into the hammock; and the last he saw of Tongla for some time was when the boy dragged the long strips of bark from the hut.

The day had fully dawned when he next opened his eyes, and the odor of roast fish caused him to look around in astonishment.

Dean was already up, and bore tokens of having made a toilet in the river. He seemed to be thoroughly refreshed, and his brother gazed in vain for any signs of sickness.

"I'm feeling all right now," he said, laughingly;

"but Tongla tells me the chill will come again to-morrow. Say, Roy, did you ever eat aloes?"

"Of course not. Why ask such a question?"

"Because if you had it would be possible to have a faint idea of what that tea is like. I was obliged to take a big dose, and it doesn't seem possible that I shall ever be able to get the terrible taste out of my mouth."

"No matter about that if the stuff cures you."

"It must be a case of kill or cure, then;" and Dean laughed so heartily that Roy no longer felt any anxiety concerning his health.

"Where did that fish come from, and how does it happen to be roasted? I thought it was supposed to be dangerous to build a fire?"

"Tongla speared it with one of the poles we used on the raft. When I turned out he was putting a sharp point on it, and in less than five minutes he had this fellow. It was barely daylight, so we came back here, dug the hole in which the cinchona was brewed a little deeper, kept the flames down as you did, and roasted him. How does that strike you for breakfast instead of tortillas?"

"I'll show you after my face is washed;" and Roy ran to where the river had eaten its way into the bank, thus forming a concealed bath-tub.

Ten minutes later the fugitives were eating a breakfast such as none could have found fault with. A small supply of salt and pepper had been brought from the hacienda, and with these condiments the fish was as palatable as if it had been prepared by the most expert cook.

"It was dangerous to build a fire," the Indian boy said while they were enjoying what seemed like a veritable feast, "but you were on such bad terms with the tortillas that I thought we might take the chances."

"This will reconcile us to maize in any form until we are where a fire can be built with safety," Roy replied, laughingly. "I'll eat tortillas for the next two days without a murmur."

"After to-night there will be none left, and we shall be fortunate if we get any more this side of the range."

This intimation that the stock of provisions was running low caused all of Roy's mirth to disappear, and he asked, gravely:

"Was everything quiet after I came to bed?"

"I heard nothing; but it is likely the men in the canoe will come back some time before to-morrow night, and I think we had better leave this camp. Dean feels well now; but in twenty-four hours he will be sick again, and unless we start it will be impossible to move until after the followers of Kabul are close upon us."

"Do you think you could stand a long tramp?" Roy asked his brother.

"We shall not travel far on this first day," Tongla interrupted. "Three hours in the morning, and as many after the siesta."

"I can hold out as long as you can," Dean said, decidedly. "If we are to go, let's start while it is cool."

Tongla had already packed the belongings, which

were decreasing each day. With ropes twisted from the mohoe-bark he made two sacks with bands to pass around the forehead, after the fashion of his own people when they carry heavy burdens, and in these everything, including the idols, was placed.

"Where's my load?" Dean asked when the Indian took up one of the sacks, four of the palm-trunks, and motioned Roy to attend to the remainder.

"It is not well that you should have any. To carry the guns and chocolate-pot will be enough until the fever has left you," Tongla replied, raising his burden as if to intimate that they should be off without further delay.

Dean understood that it would be useless to make a protest, and, in fact, he did not really feel as if he could perform any very severe labor because of the great lassitude which already threatened to overpower him.

No attempt was made to destroy the camp. It would have been impossible to cover all traces of their presence there, therefore nothing could be effected had every timber been carried away.

It could readily be seen that Tongla was by no means confident of his own ability to lead them in a direct line through this dense forest. He insisted that Dean should walk not nearer than ten paces behind him, while Roy was to remain the same distance in the rear of his brother.

"If it appears that I move to the right or the left, shout," he said, "for there must be no chance of our turning ever so slightly. The Siguia River is straight ahead, and the distance so far that we can-

not afford to make it any greater by going out of the true course."

"He's afraid of getting lost," Roy said to himself, "and that shows how much show either Dean or I would have if by any means the party should get separated."

Tongla did not intend that such an accident should happen if he could prevent it by excessive cautiousness. He advanced slowly, stopping from time to time to look first in the rear and then ahead, while more than once he blazed a tree with his machete as additional aid in keeping a true course.

Quite naturally the progress, under such circumstances, was very slow, and when the leader came to a halt at the end of about three hours' travel, no one believed they were more than five miles from the river.

It was quite time, however, that Dean be allowed to rest. The expression on his face gave proof of extreme weariness, even though he insisted he was able to continue the pace all day, and Tongla's first care was to see that he took a copious draught of cinchona.

Dean made a very wry face over the dose, but he swallowed it without hesitation; and when it was down the Indian boy said, much as if proposing a reward for obedience:

"Now I will go in search of game. There can be no danger in building a fire here, and we will have another feast, that the tortillas may be saved awhile longer."

Armed only with his bow and arrow Tongla set out, leaving to Roy the work of slinging the hammocks,

after which he and Dean stretched themselves on the network of ropes with the pleasing consciousness that they were at least in no danger of being disturbed by the Sukia woman's messengers.

Dean was tired, not sick, and he and Roy discussed the chances of reaching home by way of the sea-coast, which now seemed very good since they had put so much distance between themselves and the enemy.

Roy repeated what Tongla had said regarding the probable treatment they might expect from the Woolwas, and Dean announced as his conviction that the journey would not only be made in safety, but the time prove less than was anticipated.

"Perhaps father and mother won't reach the plantation as soon as we expected, and we shall be home before they do much worrying. Once at Greytown we can easily hire a bongo and crew to carry us up to the lake by promising to pay immediately after we arrive."

"There'll be no difficulty about that portion of it," Roy replied, with a smile; "but just now I would like to know where Tongla is. It must be an hour since he left, and the game is so plenty that he wouldn't have to do much hunting."

"I reckon he's after an armadillo. You know he said we should have one."

Roy was by no means satisfied with this supposition, but he did not think it well to arouse Dean's suspicions; therefore he changed the conversation by speaking once more of the Indians through whose country they must pass.

Another hour elapsed. Dean fell asleep, and Roy's anxiety increased. He listened intently for the slightest sound, but could hear nothing. It was the time of the siesta, and all nature seemed to be in a state of repose.

Dean did not awaken until the noonday heat gave place to cooler evening; but now he was alone—even Roy had disappeared.

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CHAPTER XIII.

SUSPENSE.

FOR SEVERAL moments after he awakened, Dean felt no anxiety because neither his brother nor Tongla was in the vicinity. He fancied they were making preparations for the night, and were close at hand; therefore he paid but little attention to the matter until half an hour passed.

Then, hearing no sound from either, he sprung to his feet in alarm, calling them loudly by name as he ran to and fro, taking good care, however, to keep within sight of the halting-place.

The hum of insects, the twitter of birds and rustling of the leaves was the only reply.

Terrified and bewildered, he leaned against a tree to collect his thoughts. That an accident had happened to Tongla there could be little doubt, and it was reasonable to suppose Roy had set out to find him; but Dean knew his brother would not dare to travel very far from the camping-place. The danger of being lost in the forest was too great to warrant him in making any lengthy excursion, and Dean could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion regarding his absence.

"I am certain he wouldn't have gone beyond sound of my voice," he said to himself; "and since

he does not answer, it must be that the Indians have tracked us here. Perhaps both the boys have been made prisoners and the idol-worshipers are only waiting an opportunity to seize me!"

This possibility caused him to look around for some means of defending himself. One of the fowling-pieces yet remained where it had been placed when the halt was first made, thus showing that Roy had taken the other; and, making sure the weapon was loaded, Dean stood with his back against a tree waiting and expecting to be attacked.

As the minutes wore on and neither friend nor enemy appeared, Dean's fear increased.

"The Indians will wait until dark, and then creep up to surround me so that there can be no chance of my making any defense. Knowing we were armed with guns, they do not intend to expose themselves."

That he would soon be captured, or pierced with arrows by unseen foes, now became a certainty to Dean, and one can imagine in some slight degree the mental agony which he suffered. Although the afternoon was cool as compared to the previous portion of the day, the perspiration streamed from his face as it never had done even while traveling under the full rays of the sun, and from time to time he shook as if the ague was upon him again. Each sixty seconds seemed almost like an hour, and the minutes dragged on until they appeared to be interminable.

But for the fact that the sun was yet illumining certain portions of the forest with tiny shafts of light he would have thought it was midnight, when

a faint cry from far away in the distance caused the blood to bound in his veins. It might have been the call of a bird; but the possibility that Roy was returning plunged him in a perfect delirium. Without waiting to ascertain if it really was a human voice, he shouted again and again at the full strength of his lungs, pausing not to listen until his breath literally failed him.

Then he waited for a reply, counting the seconds that he might have some idea of the passage of time, and as he whispered "twenty" the night wind bore to his eager ears the cry, now so distinct that there could be no doubt:

"Hel-l-o! Dean!"

"Roy! Roy!" he replied; and then understanding that his brother was shaping a course by aid of his voice, he continued to call until the crashing of bushes near by told that one of the missing boys had returned.

"Where have you been?" Dean cried, as he clasped Roy in his arms as if to assure himself there could be no mistake.

"Lost in the woods, and when I heard you shout was about to start off in another direction. I went out intending to go only so far as I could keep this place in sight, but before many minutes got completely bewildered;" and Roy threw himself on the ground like one on the verge of exhaustion.

"How long have you been tramping around?"

"Two or three hours, I should judge."

"And you saw no signs of Tongla?"

"Not a thing. He also must have lost his way,

and may be traveling on a course directly opposite to the true one, unless he is already exhausted, for he has been absent ever since we halted."

"Do you think there is any chance the Indians from the ruins have caught him? I began to think they had both of you, and would capture or kill me when it was dark enough to permit of their doing so without exposing themselves."

"That cannot have happened, otherwise they would certainly have made me prisoner while I was roaming around. He has lost his way, and, judging from my own experience, there is little chance of our ever seeing him again."

"And if that is the case, what shall we do?" Dean asked, his voice trembling with fear.

"I know of but one thing, which is to find our way back to the river again."

"That would be to fall into the hands of the Indians who are hunting us."

"It is certain death to stay here in the forest. We have only got water enough to last until morning, and must move by daylight whether Tongla comes or not."

Dean could make no reply. At the very time when he was beginning to think they might possibly have put a safe distance between themselves and the enemy, this disaster, which promised to be the last of many, had come upon them. The short-lived hope fled, leaving in its place a dull despair.

No one surrenders life, however, without a struggle; and as the darkness closed in while they stood under the gigantic trees in silence, he asked:

"What are we to do from now until morning? There may be jaguars about, and the hammocks won't be a guard against them, as in the case of the warees."

"We'll build a fire. Matters can't be made much worse than they now are, and a blaze will serve to keep the beasts away."

"But if the Indians are near, it will be seen."

"We may as well meet them here as at the river," Roy replied, moodily; and then he began gathering branches and twigs, with but little regard to the scorpions or snakes which might be beneath the decaying wood. He was in that frame of mind when one no longer thinks it worth his while to guard against new dangers.

Hewing down with his machete the vines and shrubs a short distance beyond where the hammocks had been suspended, he soon started a cheery blaze, and was on the point of proposing that they try to eat something when a groan from Dean told that he was suffering from another attack of chills and fever.

"Get into the hammock!" he cried, all his fears for the future being forgotten in this additional cause for anxiety.

Dean managed to throw himself on the swinging bed, and Roy forced him to swallow a large draught of the cinchona. This done, he covered him with everything at hand, including his own jacket, and then the only occupation possible was to keep the fire burning and wait for the dawn of another day, when the condition of affairs could hardly be changed for the better.

"If Dean is sick in the morning we can't leave here," he said to himself, "and the palm-juice must serve us in the place of water."

The trunks of the palm-trees had been placed in an upright position near the hammocks, and he now examined them to make sure that none of them were overturned.

Toward midnight the chill left Dean and the fever took its place, when the sick boy called at brief intervals for a cooling drink.

The work of attending to him and keeping the fire burning brightly occupied nearly all of Roy's time until sunrise; and this was a great relief, since it served in some slight degree to prevent his mind from dwelling on their forlorn condition.

When the morning dawned Dean was yet so ill that it was with difficulty he could raise his head from the pillow of plantain-leaves which Roy had placed in the hammock, and the question of changing camp was settled for that day at least.

Now he no longer expected to see Tongla again, and began to overhaul the baggage with a view of reducing the load to such weight that he might carry everything. The golden idols must perforce be left behind, and with them all except the guns, hammocks, chocolate and the pot of cinchona.

"Although it isn't likely we could find this place again, I'll bury the idols," he thought. "Those Indians sha'n't get hold of them if I can prevent it."

Despite his troubles hunger began to assert itself, and when Dean refused to take any food he made a

light breakfast of tortillas, eating but one, although he could have consumed the entire lot without discomfort.

Another dose of the bitter mixture was given to the invalid; the fire was allowed to die out, and then Roy had before him another dreary time of waiting, broken only when Dean asked for a draught of the refreshing palm-juice.

It seemed as if each succeeding hour lengthened; the sounds of forest life irritated him, and he began to ask himself if it would not be safe to travel a short distance after the evening shadows began to gather, in case Dean felt better, when the sound as of some heavy body forcing its way through the underbrush caused him to spring to his feet.

Cocking the gun, he stole forward cautiously, ready to fire at the first glimpse of what he supposed was a wild beast, when Tongla appeared from among the foliage and fell senseless at his feet.

Mingled surprise and joy prevented Roy from so much as moving for several seconds; and then throwing aside his weapon, he dragged the lifeless boy into the clearing.

"Tongla has come!" he shouted, and despite the fever which had such a firm hold upon him, Dean leaped to his feet; but he also fell prostrate before it was possible to advance a single step.

"Come, old fellow, this won't do," Roy said as he left the Indian for a moment to aid his brother into the hammock again. "If I'm to have two sick fellows on my hands, the least they can do is to remain quiet, and not go tumbling around like this."

"But what is the matter with Tongla? He looks as if he were dead."

"I don't know what ails him, unless he's got a touch of your fever. I'll lift him into the hammock and give him some water; perhaps that will bring him to his senses."

During the next ten minutes Roy had quite as much work on hand as he could conveniently perform. After raising Tongla from the ground to the bed of cords he put the half-filled canteen to his lips, and the boy swallowed the entire contents before opening his eyes. Then he spoke a few words in his native language, stared around as if surprised at finding himself in such a place, and laid back entirely exhausted.

"He's used up; that's what's the matter," Roy said. "I wouldn't wonder if the poor fellow had been without food or water since yesterday morning. I'll try him on the last of the tortillas, anyway."

Still appearing oblivious to his surroundings, the Indian boy ate ravenously, and not until the last tortilla had disappeared did Roy cease feeding him.

"That settles our supply of food, and it will be a fast-day with us unless I can manage to find some game close around the camp."

"Never mind, so long as he is with us," Dean said, cheerily. "An hour ago we'd been willing to give up a good deal more than the food for the sake of seeing him."

"Don't think I'm worrying about what he's eating. I'd make him a present of all the idols if they'd do any good. He appears to be going to

sleep now, and you'd better try to do the same thing. I'll sit two or three yards away, in the hope of shooting something eatable."

"Don't go beyond the sound of my voice."

"You needn't fear that I'll run the chance of getting lost again. One such experience is more than I need. It was terrible, Dean, to wander around without the slightest idea of the right direction, and seeing what looked like the same trees over and over again, no matter how fast or far I walked. There was one spell when it seemed as if I was insane, and then it was necessary to sit down until I could pull myself together. In a forest like this there is nothing to guide a fellow, and the sense of utter helplessness is something which cannot be described."

"Don't talk of it," Dean replied, with a shiver. "We may all have a taste before we strike the river Tongla tells about."

"If we are together it can't seem so terrible, although I don't care to repeat the experience, even with others to keep me company."

Then Roy insisted that his brother should drink more of the cinchona; and looking earnestly at Tongla to make sure he was not in a swoon but sleeping peacefully, he went a short distance from the encampment in the poor hope that some game would be accommodating enough to come within range.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INDIAN VILLAGE.

ROY HAD but little faith that any game would pass within shooting distance; therefore he felt quite as much surprise as delight when, about an hour after taking up his position at the foot of a tree, four agouti come from the bushes hardly a dozen feet away.

They appeared to have no fear of him, and by using his gun skillfully and rapidly two were killed, at the expense of a cartridge from each barrel.

"That is a pretty high price to pay for a dinner, considering the fact that we haven't got very much ammunition left," he said, as he picked up the rabbit-like animals and started toward the encampment. "I ought not to grumble, though, for we'd be on mighty short allowance if they hadn't come along."

Dean was awake when Roy approached, but Tongla's eyes were yet closed. The reports of the gun had not disturbed him, and Dean asked:

"Can you cook them as he did?"

"I'm going to try it. A fellow can do a good deal when it's a case of must. Besides, I want Tongla to sleep as long as possible."

Since there was no particular reason why he should hurry, Roy set about the task in a leisurely

fashion. He dug a hole at the place where the camp-fire had been built on the previous night, filled it with wood sufficient to make a large bed of coals, and while this was burning dressed the game.

An hour later the roast was ready, and cooked quite as well as if the Indian boy had superintended the operation. Roy awakened Tongla after considerable difficulty, and Dean's fever was so nearly gone that he seemed eager for his share of the meat.

"Where did you find me?" Tongla asked, as he descended from the hammock and approached the plantain-leaf table.

"You came here without assistance," Roy replied, in surprise. "Don't you remember?"

"I know of nothing that happened after being convinced it would be impossible to find you again."

"When was that?"

"When the sun rose this morning, and I could not decide in which direction the river lay. I remember running with all speed, thinking to meet death while still struggling to escape from the horrible gloom, but that is all."

"Then without being conscious of the fact you must have come directly here, and I saw you as you fell. I've been doing the hunting to-day, and after eating some of this roast you can tell us the story."

"There is not much more than you know," Tongla replied, as he began the meal. "On leaving here I wandered around a long while without seeing anything which would serve as food, and on trying to retrace my steps, learned that I was lost. From that moment I thought of nothing save finding you.

Not for a single instant did I rest during the night, for your lives as well as my own depended on our being together once more."

"After this we will do the hunting in company or go without food," Roy replied; and then he gave his undivided attention to the meat, of which he stood so sadly in need.

When the meal was finished Dean, who had eaten but sparingly, said:

"There is no chance that I shall go to sleep again very soon, therefore both of you must lie down while I stand watch. It can be done in my hammock, consequently I shall feel none the worse for it."

Tongla insisted that he was completely rested; but Roy was determined he should spend the remainder of the day in slumber, and the boy reluctantly returned to the swinging bed.

"Now you do the same," Dean said, and after a moment's hesitation the command was obeyed.

Roy had indulged in but little sleep since they left the ruins, and Tongla was yet thoroughly weary, therefore these two slumbered dreamlessly and uninterruptedly while the invalid kept watch from his couch.

In this manner the entire day was spent, and the gloom of night had enshrouded the forest when Tongla awoke.

"You should have called me many hours ago," he said, springing from the hammock, and his voice aroused Roy.

"You looked so comfortable that I enjoyed the

sight; and, besides, I'm feeling so much better that there is no reason why I should not do a portion of the work. Now that the water is gone I begin to dislike the palm-juice. Don't you suppose we could get a drink by digging a deep hole?"

"There is no need of doing that. I saw the rain-plant near by when we halted, and by making a torch we can soon find it," Tongla said, as he groped around for dry wood.

"The rain-plant?" Roy repeated. "What do you mean?"

Tongla waited until he had made and lighted a torch, when he said:

"Come; I will show you."

The boys were too curious to reject the invitation, and followed their companion a short distance away, where was a dense mass of vines depending from the trees.

"There!" he said, pointing to the fork or crotch of a logwood, where, apparently growing in the solid trunk, was a parasitic plant, with broad leaves which curled around until a vessel somewhat after the shape of a "horn of plenty" was formed. "In each of those we shall find water enough to keep us from thirst until morning."

With a little assistance from Roy the Indian climbed up the trunk, and cutting one of these—Nature's goblets—passed it down to Dean, who found in it fully a quart of clear water.

"Why, it's almost as good, although not quite as cold, as that which we had in the tunnel!" Dean exclaimed, in surprise.

"It is the rain and dew which the leaf collects for him who travels through the forest. The God of the Working-Hand placed it there that the Indian might not perish when the white men drove him from his home. We will not take any more than we need, for others may pass this way thirsty."

Tongla handed one more leaf to Roy, and then descended, having satisfied his own wants by drinking from one vessel without cutting it from the stem.

On returning to the hammocks Roy explained that he had kept a fire going during the night Tongla was absent, and proposed that the same plan be pursued now.

The Indian readily agreed, since the light of the flames could not be seen a dozen yards owing to the density of the foliage; and soon the boys were sitting in front of a cheery blaze discussing the work of the next day.

Roy and Tongla divided the watching on this night, it not being thought advisable to let Dean do any portion of it until he was stronger, and when the sun rose once more nothing had been seen or heard to cause alarm.

This was the day when the victim of chills and fever should feel comparatively well, although it was expected the illness would return twenty-four hours later, and when the remnants of the agouti had been eaten by way of breakfast, Tongla proposed that the journey be continued.

"We have many leagues before us," he said, "and unless each day sees some advance we shall be a very long time on the road."

Dean declared that he felt able to perform as much labor as any other member of the party, and in a few moments everything was in readiness for the tramp. As before, Roy and Tongla insisted on carrying all the burden; but the palm-trunks were left behind, because there were plenty more to be found and the juice was beginning to ferment.

Now, with the memory of his sufferings fresh in mind, the Indian proceeded more cautiously than before, to prevent any possibility of traveling in a circle, and the advance was necessarily slow; but when they came to a halt at about ten o'clock it was believed not less than five miles had been traversed.

"We should be at least ten miles from the river, providing we have traveled in a straight line," Roy said as he threw himself upon one of the hammocks, after they had been slung and the foliage beaten down. "That is surely far enough to make it certain we are well clear of the Sukia's messengers, and we have nothing to fear from them until we strike the range again."

"And that we shall not do unless the Woolwas drive us from their country," Tongla replied, decidedly. "Now I will hunt for our dinner."

"We'll all go with you;" and Roy sprung to his feet. "The last time you tried that job we didn't see you for twenty-four hours, and it sha'n't happen again."

"I am only going to that plantain-tree;" and the Indian pointed a short distance away. "You need not fear that I shall get in the same trouble twice. If we have meat to-night, that will be enough."

The atmosphere was so hot that a dinner of fruit satisfied every desire, and when it had been eaten all hands composed themselves for a long siesta, since there did not appear to be any good reason why a watch should be kept when they were so far from the followers of Kabul.

At about four o'clock Tongla aroused the boys, measured out a dose of cinchona for Dean, and proposed that the journey be continued. Refreshed by the long nap the others were willing, and again the little party forced their way through the rank vegetation toward the Siguia River.

One does not indulge in much conversation while traveling heavily laden where progress is made only after a severe struggle with vines and bushes, and from the time of starting until shortly before sunset not a word was exchanged.

Then Tongla came to a full halt as he motioned for his companions to remain silent, while he peered through the undergrowth with every evidence of uneasiness.

The white boys stood like statues until the Indian, stepping back a few paces, whispered, as he pointed straight ahead:

"There is a Woolwa village. It is too late to make our way around it before dark, and I do not dare stay here until morning."

Full of curiosity, Roy and Dean pressed forward to where Tongla had been standing, and saw, instead of a collection of huts, as would have been inferred from their companion's words, a single building about a hundred feet long and twenty wide. The

roof was upheld by stout posts, and thatched with leaves; the front and ends were open, while at the back were a series of little rooms which looked very much like stalls in a stable. The floor appeared to be formed of stone, and raised six inches or more above the earth.

In this odd "village" could be seen half a hundred men, women and children, some working, others playing, and the majority swinging in hammocks suspended from the roof. They did not seem to be a very ferocious party, and Roy whispered to Tongla:

"Are you certain they would do any mischief if we showed ourselves?"

"They are the enemies of my people."

"Of course you know best; but if we must stay in this portion of the country any length of time, it strikes me it would be a good idea to make friends with them."

Tongla did not reply for some moments, but stood as if buried in deep thought, while Roy gazed up and down the narrow stream which ran between them and the building, to discover some way of crossing it without swimming.

While he was thus engaged a number of women came out with what appeared to be earthen jars, and walked directly to the middle, where they filled the vessels with water. Roy could see that they stepped on a long row of stones, which evidently led entirely across; therefore he was satisfied there would be no trouble in gaining the village if a visit should be decided upon.

At this juncture Dean asked what his brother had been saying to Tongla, and on being informed, at once declared his belief in the advisability of trying to make terms with the tribe.

"We shall be obliged to pass more than one town like this before reaching the coast, and it is well to know now what may be expected. With our guns we can hold the whole crowd in check, if they turn ugly; but I am sure it will be all right when Tongla tells them that we are running away from their enemies."

"I will visit them," the Indian said, at length; "but they must not know you are here until I have learned whether it is safe for all to proceed."

To this plan Roy objected most strenuously.

"If you go alone, and they are disposed to do any harm, we shall not be there to aid you; while if all march over, the sight of our guns may force them to be at least civil."

"I must cross alone," Tongla said, decidedly; "but I will remain near the stream, and if they threaten, you can discharge the guns. Then they will not know but that there is a large force concealed in the thicket."

"The matter looks different when you put it that way, and I won't say any more. Go ahead; Dean and I will stand ready in case there is any trouble; but don't let them entice you up to the building until there can be no doubt about their honesty."

"I will be careful," Tongla said, and laying down everything, he went out in full view of those in the village with not so much as a stick in his hands.

The white boys watched from the thicket; saw him cross the stream and halt on the bank, as the dwellers from the long building came toward him in a perfect throng, and then he was hidden from view by press of numbers.

CHAPTER XV.

SUSPICIONS.

IT WAS fully five minutes before the boys in the thicket could see Tongla, because of the crowd which pressed around him, and more than once did Dean insist that it was their duty to show themselves.

"They may have killed him by this time, for all we know," he said anxiously. "If nothing has happened he would stand where we could see him."

"You may be certain he'd manage, in some way, to let us understand if matters were going wrong," Roy replied. "A single scream would be enough."

"Perhaps they have taken good care to prevent anything like that."

"It isn't reasonable to suppose such a state of affairs. They seem to be friendly, and if he is going into details regarding our trouble at the ruins it will require a long while."

Five minutes more elapsed, and then the watchers' fears were dispelled by seeing Tongla step from amid the throng as he pointed in the direction where the boys were concealed.

"It's all right," Roy added, in a tone of relief. "Now he's telling them about us, and it won't be long before the matter is settled."

Almost immediately after Roy ceased speaking Tongla began to cross the stream, followed by two old men, and the boys stepped from out the thicket to meet them.

As they came into view the crowd on the opposite shore began to shout and gesticulate in the most friendly manner, and Dean whispered:

"We had better lay down our guns to show that we have no idea of fighting."

Roy followed his brother's example by dropping his weapon and standing with outstretched hands as Tongla and his companions came up the slight elevation.

Before the Indian boy could speak, even had he been intending to do so, the old men saluted Roy and Dean by placing their open hands on the latters' heads, and then turned to descend the slope, utter ing at the same time a single word.

"Follow," Tongla said, in a low tone, as he lifted one of the sacks, and the boys waited only long enough to gather up the remainder of the property before obeying.

The crowd on the bank of the stream gave way as the party approached, and amid a silence which seemed almost ominous the visitors were escorted to the house, one of the stall-like apartments being pointed out as their quarters.

This being done the old men left them, and, save for the throng of curious children which stood a long distance away, the fugitives were comparatively alone.

"I call this a lucky hit!" Dean exclaimed, as he

proceeded to unpack the sacks of twine that the hammocks might be slung before dark. "What did they say to you, Tongla?"

"I told the story, except in regard to the idols, and the people acted as if glad of the chance to help us escape. The head man said we should stay here until they were ready to go down the river, which would be in a few days, and travel with them."

"It begins to look as if our finally reaching home was a settled fact, for once at Bluefields there will be no further trouble," Roy added, in a tone of delight. "We can very well afford to stay a week, if necessary, and perhaps by that time Dean will have got rid of his fever and ague."

Tongla did not display as much joy as his companions; he was grave while they were radiant, and noticing this, Dean asked:

"What is the matter? Don't things suit you?"

"They should," was the evasive reply. "I am thinking that we must be careful to keep the figures of the gods concealed."

"Why? These people do not worship them."

"I am not certain; but they are of gold, and it is not well to let it be known we have so much treasure. If we remain long they must be hidden, or one of us keep a watch both night and day."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of two women who brought a calabash of stewed meat, and bread made of ground cassava baked in the ashes. A girl pushed slyly into the apartment a gourd of water, and when the food had been placed on the floor the attendants withdrew.

"There ain't much danger of our starving yet a while," Roy said, gleefully; "but I would like to be told what kind of meat this is. Knowing that some of the tribes in this country are cannibals, a fellow naturally feels suspicious."

"This is waree," Tongla replied, quickly. "The Woolwas do not eat their enemies."

"It tastes a great deal better than the ugly things look when they are just under your hammock in the night," Dean said, as, using his machete for a fork, he brought out from the calabash a generous portion.

It was a hearty meal which the boys made, and the party of children who watched them did not in any way interfere with its full enjoyment. All ate until it was impossible to take another mouthful, and then went to the open part of the building, where the Indians were evidently awaiting their arrival.

The men were clad in what appeared to be white ponchos wound twice around their bodies and fastened at the waist with a girdle of mohoe-bark; the boys sported a much smaller garment of the same fashion, while the women and girls were clad in a single petticoat. A white cotton band tied tightly about the head, probably to keep the hair in place, was conspicuous among the females, and, as Dean said, "was mighty convenient for the purpose of distinguishing a boy from a girl."

When the guests joined the main body of the community they found a circle of old men, each with a small torch in his hand, seated within a ring of raised stones at one corner of the building, and here Tongla came to a full stop.

"What's going on?" Roy whispered, and the Indian replied:

"These are the head men, and they will want to hear our story again."

In this Tongla was not mistaken. A few seconds later one of the men advanced, took Roy by the hand and led him into the circle, the other two boys following.

Here they stood while the men remained seated, and the eldest of the party began what sounded very much like a regular speech, Tongla translating it when the speaker came to a close.

"He says that we are welcome to stay here until it pleases us to go down the river; that they are friends of the white men, and shall continue to be; but he asks that we tell the story of our flight in order that all may understand whether there is any chance that the followers of Kabul will come this way in search of us."

"That's all right, of course; but you'll have to do the talking," Roy replied.

Without hesitation Tongla began, the women and children gathering near the ring of stones to listen; and that he gave a detailed account of their misadventures the boys understood from the length of time occupied in the recital.

When he had finished there was profound silence for fully a minute, after which one of the party arose, fanned his torch into a blaze by swinging it around his head several times, and then began what Roy thought was a reply to Tongla's story.

He talked rapidly for some time, gesticulating

violently, and pointing from one guest to another, until Dean felt quite certain he objected to their remaining in the village.

"What's the matter now?" he whispered to Tongla.

"This man does not believe I have told everything. He says the followers of Kabul, treacherous though they are, do not war upon children."

"Do they suspect the real cause?" Roy asked, apprehensively.

"If they did, the demand for the idols would have been made before this. I——"

He was interrupted by one of the party who approached, spoke a few words in a low tone, and then returned to his seat.

"We are to go away while the council is being held," Tongla said as he walked toward their own apartment; and the curious ones on the outside were so deeply interested in what was being discussed that no attention was paid to their movements.

Roy looked around inquisitively as they walked the entire length of the building for the second time, and observed that the inside of the roof was hung with bunches of plantains, bananas, yams and dried meat until it resembled a vast store-house. Prosaic as the articles were, the sight reassured him; for, despite what Tongla had said, he could not repress the fear that these people might be cannibals. He remembered reading, just before leaving home, when he and Dean were studying the histories regarding their future dwelling-place, that certain

tribes in Nicaragua were addicted to the use of human flesh, and this had troubled him not a little since arriving at the village.

"Now what are they up to?" Dean asked, when they were in the "pen," as Roy termed the room.

"I don't know. Perhaps they have a suspicion of why we came here, and do not wish us to hear them discussing it."

"If it's no worse than that we needn't worry," Dean replied; "but I fancied that two or three of those old fellows didn't like the idea of our being here."

"They seemed to be willing to have us come," Roy said, thoughtfully. "So far as we could see, the invitation was a cordial one."

"Those who came to meet us were very friendly," Tongla added. "It is some who were not consulted, and they appear to think there is danger in allowing us to remain."

"Then go back and tell them we will leave this very night. Say we can sleep in the woods, and our guns are sufficient with which to procure food."

"It is best to wait until the council is finished," Tongla replied. "It may be that they will decide in our favor."

"We won't wait for that;" and Roy spoke in a tone of great determination. "Tell them now, and if they are so disposed we'll clear out at once."

This was neither more nor less than a command, and the Indian boy obeyed, but not with a very good grace. He walked half the length of the

building, called one of the women to his side, and by her sent some message to those in council.

She went toward the circle of stones, waited until the man who was delivering an impassioned speech had ceased, and then spoke. A moment later she returned to Tongla and led him forward.

From their "pen" the boys watched him, saw that he spoke gravely for a few seconds, and was about to retire when one of the party prevented him. Then ensued a long and noisy discussion, at the end of which the Indian boy came slowly back, looking very much troubled.

"Well, are we to go?" Dean asked, impatiently.

"They will not allow us to leave, however eager we may be to do so. I cannot understand why there is any question regarding our staying or departing."

The white boys could not but be disturbed by this answer, as well as by the evident anxiety of their companion, and Roy said, regretfully:

"It is my fault that we came here at all; but at the time it seemed to be the wisest course. Matters begin to look as if we had got into another scrape, and the question is, What shall we do?"

"We are powerless," Tongla replied. "Until they decide, we are the same as prisoners."

"I'm going to learn whether we are or not;" and Roy walked quickly out of the building, following along the stream until he disappeared in the undergrowth.

Watching those at the other end of the house, Dean and Tongla saw that notice had been taken of

the boy's departure, and almost immediately two of the younger men lounged toward the water-course, as if going for a stroll; but they took good care to follow Roy's footsteps.

"That settles it!" Dean said, in dismay. "If one goes out alone he will be watched, and if all three should attempt to leave I reckon there would be trouble."

"That is true. We are prisoners." And Tongla threw himself on his hammock, where he remained in moody silence until Dean asked:

"Can't we hide the idols somewhere? Matters might be worse, if that be possible, in case they are found."

"We would be obliged to take them from the house, and while they watch every movement there is no opportunity."

By this time Roy could be seen coming up the stream, with the two men about a dozen paces in the rear, and Dean went to meet him.

"That question was settled very emphatically," Roy said to his brother, with a mirthless laugh. "These fellows were behind me before I got fairly out of sight."

"We saw them, and Tongla seems thoroughly discouraged. If we could only bury those idols!"

"That's just what I've been thinking of; but there's no way to fix it. Our only course is to hang around as if we didn't want to leave, and perhaps they'll come to the conclusion that there is nothing very dangerous about us; but the idols must be kept under cover."

"If these men take a notion to search our stuff we can't help ourselves."

"We won't worry about that yet awhile. There's enough disagreeable to think of without speculating upon something which may never happen."

CHAPTER XVI.

PRISONERS.

IT CAN well be fancied that the boys were not feeling particularly cheerful when they were alone in the "pen" once more. There could no longer be any question but that they were prisoners, for a certain length of time at least, and the uncertainty regarding the future was even worse than the knowledge of positive suffering would have been.

Tongla bestirred himself to set the place to rights, and when that was done re-hung his hammock in such a manner that it partially blocked the entrance to their apartment. Then he laid down with his machete by his side, and Roy asked:

"What is that for? Do you fear an attack?"

"It is well to be prepared."

"But we would surely get the worst of a row while there are so many against us."

"One never knows what may happen. I shall watch, and you can go to sleep."

"I don't fancy either of us will do much of that sort of thing to-night. A fellow's eyes are pretty sure to stay open under such circumstances as these."

As could be seen by peering around the partitions formed of sections cut from the cabbage-palm, the

old men were yet in council, and the remainder of the inhabitants were so interested in the proceedings that they stayed where all which was said might be overheard.

"I wonder how long they'll keep that up?" Dean asked, as he placed one of the fowling-pieces near his hammock preparatory to retiring.

"Until our fate has been decided. It's a pity Tongla didn't hang around near by to find out something."

"That was not allowed," the Indian boy said, with a smile. "We were invited to go to bed, and matters might have been uncomfortable had we refused to accept the invitation."

All the guests laid down, for it was not well to show their suspicions at this early stage; but neither intended to indulge in sleep. Yet despite the possible danger, both Roy and Dean were soon slumbering as sweetly as if nothing had occurred to cause alarm.

The sun had looked over the tree-tops some time before either awakened, and then leaping quickly down Roy said to Tongla, who was seated just outside the "pen:"

"Why, the Indians have all disappeared! Where are they?"

The boy pointed toward the stream, which just below the ford widened into a regular basin, and there could be seen nearly the entire population of the village enjoying a bath. They were swimming around like ducks, shouting, talking and laughing in the jolliest manner possible.

"I shouldn't mind sharing in the sport; but I suppose it will be better to wait until we know what they propose to do with us?"

"No one would find fault. You and Dean can go while I stay here to watch the treasure."

Tongla seemed positive that, whatever the decision arrived at on the previous night, the boys were at liberty to bathe, and they went at once toward the river, but, after partially undressing, plunged in at a point some distance from the gay throng. They were not to be alone very long, however, for as soon as a party of Indian boys caught a glimpse of the white lads they swam up stream laughing and yelling, as by gestures they invited the new-comers to a race.

Roy and Dean joined in the sport with hearty good-will, although they could not hope to excel these dark-skinned fellows, who appeared to be perfectly at home in the water; and during nearly an hour the older inhabitants of the village enjoyed the trials of skill, in which the visitors were invariably beaten.

Then the entire crowd trooped up to the building where some of the women had been preparing a breakfast of fruit, and bread somewhat resembling tortillas. The new-comers were fed in their own apartment, as on the previous evening, and when the meal was finished each person went about the business or pleasure of the day without paying the slightest attention to the little party, who had good reason to consider themselves prisoners.

"I wonder what they mean to do?" Roy asked,

in a tone of perplexity, as he stood with Dean and Tongla by the entrance to their "pen."

"We shall hear in good time," the Indian boy replied. "I think they are waiting to learn if the fol lowers of Kabul are on our track, for before you awakened this morning I saw the men collecting their weapons, as if preparing for an attack."

"But are we to remain under cover all day?"

"I do not think anything would be said if we went out, providing we remain near the house."

"Then let's see what is going on; it will be better than standing here moping."

Dean followed his brother; but Tongla clambered into the hammock again in order to watch over the golden gods which he feared might lead them into yet greater difficulties.

The white boys saw plenty to attract their attention. Here were a party of women and girls grinding maize between two stones, the bottom one very large and hollowed in the center, and the other small enough to be held conveniently in both hands. Others were crushing, in the same manner, wild sugar-cane, and mixing the juice with powdered cacao, to make, as Tongla afterward told them, a kind of liquor called ulung.

Some of the older women were spinning and weaving native cotton in a clumsy sort of fashion. In fact all the female portion of the community were laboring industriously, while the men and boys appeared to take life very easily.

Half a dozen young men were exhibiting their skill in throwing a short wooden spear, and from the

precision with which they hit the target at a distance of from twenty to thirty paces it could readily be seen how slight a chance the little party, with their two fowling-pieces, would have in case of a pitched battle.

Next in interest to this last scene was that presented by the roof of the building, where were congregated a number of tame parrots and macaws trying to defend themselves against four or five small monkeys who were making strenuous efforts to pluck out the gaudy feathers from the tails of these winged residents. Now and then one of the birds would strike viciously at an over-brave monkey, and in case of success each parrot and macaw seemed to consider it his especial duty to make the greatest possible amount of noise.

Although there were so very many strange and curious things to be seen, the boys did not spend very much time out of doors. The mental anxiety was so great that after a few moments both re-entered the building to discuss the situation with Tongla for at least the twentieth time.

They arrived just as the Indian had conceived what he believed to be a brilliant scheme for disposing of the golden idols, and he unfolded it without delay.

"The stones which form this floor are not fast ened together," he said; and Roy asked, in surprise:

"What if they are not? It doesn't make any difference to us, as I can see."

"But we might raise one now, when all the peo-

ple are outside, and bury the figures of the gods beneath it," Tongla added, eagerly.

"And then perhaps not have a chance to get at them again," Dean said. "After carrying them so far, we don't want to run the risk of losing them."

"If these people see the gods, as I am certain they will if we keep them in the sacks, we shall not only lose all, but be in great trouble besides."

"Tongla's plan is a good one," Roy said, approvingly. "If we are forced to remain here many days, it is safe to say the Indians will find out what we've got in our knapsacks, when there's every chance of a big row, more especially if these fellows are idol-worshipers. Now the gold will be just as safe, so far as we are concerned, under one of these stones, and it wouldn't be much trouble to take it out again when we have a chance to leave."

Dean was silenced, but not convinced. He understood that the Indians might seize the gods at any moment, and yet to bury them seemed like relinquishing all title to the treasure. Not being able to say why Tongla's plan was unwise he offered no further objections, and his companions proceeded to carry it into effect without delay.

By lowering the hammocks a trifle, and pushing the sacks near the entrance to the "pen," it was possible so to conceal their movements that no one could see what was going on, except by coming directly into the room.

After trying all the stones, it was found that a block at the extreme end of the apartment could be moved more readily than any of the others, and

by using their machetes as levers the task was accomplished with but little labor.

Beneath it the earth was packed hard, although not so solidly but that a hole could be bored with their weapons, and in less than ten minutes from the time the plan was proposed the golden gods were buried in such a manner that they could readily be taken out when the proper time arrived.

Then the stone was replaced, and the boys spent some time in trampling upon it, that there might be no evidence of its removal.

"Now we can all go out," Tongla said, in a tone of satisfaction, as he began to replace their goods as before. "No one can suspect we have hidden anything, and the men may search the sacks when they please."

Relieved at being no longer obliged to guard the treasure, Tongla went at once to the stream and enjoyed his long-delayed bath, while Roy and Dean sought a shady spot near the bank where they could keep him in view.

To this outing none of the villagers appeared to object; but after a few moments the boys noticed that at different points men suddenly came into view as if by accident, and they were stationed in such manner that there would have been no chance to escape had the little party been disposed to adopt desperate measures.

"If we didn't know it before, there'd be no question now about our being prisoners," Roy said, mournfully; "and what is more, they don't intend to give us the slightest chance of escaping."

"I don't understand their reason for keeping us. It can't be in order to steal our traps, for those might easily have been taken last night."

"There's no means of finding out until they get ready to tell us," Roy replied, with a sigh; and then Tongla, his bath finished, joined them.

During the two hours which followed the boys remained out of doors, but always under supervision of five or six men, and then, the time for the siesta having arrived, they returned to the building.

Dean led the way to their "pen," and as he reached the entrance started back with a cry of dismay.

"They've stolen our things and put a whole family in here with us!" he said, as Roy and Tongla crowded past him.

A woman and two small children were occupying the apartment, and the former did not so much as look at the boys when they approached. The hammocks had been taken down and others put in their places, while nothing could be seen of the weapons or sacks.

The three stood gazing at these evidences of eviction in speechless astonishment until a very old man came toward them and spoke a few words to Tongla.

"He says that this place was not good enough for us, and that our traps have been moved nearer the middle of the building," Tongla said, when the man had finished. "We may as well find out where the place is."

"But we can't leave here on account of the buried

treasure," Dean whispered, forgetting in his excitement that none save his own party could have understood him, however loud he may have spoken. "Tell him that this 'pen' suits us much better than any other in the house, and we *must* stay here."

"It would be useless; there is some reason for moving us, and we shall only cause them to grow suspicious by making objections."

"Come along!" Roy said, sternly, pulling his brother by the coat-sleeve. "That old fellow is watching every movement we make, and he'll have a fine yarn to tell the others if we stand here disputing."

Thus urged, Dean could do no less than follow Roy and Tongla, who were being conducted by the old man to another "pen" nearly midway of the row, where there were ample evidences of recent occupancy.

"This doesn't begin to be as good as the other," Roy said, as he inspected the uncleanly place, "therefore the excuse which has been made is a false one."

"Do you not see that from here they will have less trouble watching us?" the Indian boy asked. "There we were at the extreme end, and might possibly be able to slip out; now the prisoners will be in the midst of their captors, and every move must be known."

The old man gazed at the little party intently, as if to learn their ideas regarding the change, and when his curiosity was satisfied he walked slowly

away, leaving them to rearrange their scanty household goods.

"It begins to look as if we had said good-by to the idols," Roy said, ruefully. "I can't see how it will ever be possible to dig them up without telling the whole story."

Now he and Tongla regretted not having listened to Dean a few hours longer, for the gods might have been buried in that apartment as well as the other, and a short delay would have prevented this apparent disaster.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LOST IDOLS.

IT IS NOT to be wondered at that the boys were disheartened by this loss of the treasure through their own act, and during the time of the siesta but little else was spoken of. Sleep did not visit their eyelids, and while the other occupants of the building gave very palpable evidence of being wrapped in slumber they bewailed their misfortune, with hardly a thought that the gods might yet be recovered.

Tongla did not hesitate to say this last disaster was caused by the direct interference of Kabul, and stated as his firm belief that they would never reach the Coloney plantation until the idols had been restored to their worshipers.

"Suppose for a moment these images really are gods," Roy said, impatiently; "how are we to do as you say, provided we could get them in our possession? You don't know what gods they are—never saw the same kind of figures before, and concluded they must have been worshiped by those who built the ruined city. Having been forgotten, we can't restore them to any one, and they really are nothing more than so much gold. It is for that reason only the Sukia and her friends are so eager to get possession of them. If they were nothing but stone we would not have been molested."

"It makes no difference to the Sukia whether they are precious metal or decaying wood; they are the gods, and as such must be protected."

"Now you're talking foolishly, Tongla. The Sukia cares nothing for idols of stone, because your people have assisted in carrying a number of such material out of Nicaragua, and they are to be seen at the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, in my country."

"Have *you* seen them there?" Tongla asked, incredulously.

"Certainly, and so has Dean. The gentleman who was Minister from my country to yours in the year 1849 sent several on, and in order to do so it was necessary the Indians should aid him. Some came from the very city where we found the ones just lost, and your people were perfectly willing he should carry them away. If they had been made of gold, like those we found, most likely there would have been a big row. Judging from that fact, you can see why the followers of Kabul are eager to catch us."

Tongla remained silent for several moments. He could not doubt what Roy told him, and perhaps for the first time he really questioned the divine attributes of his gods.

"It may be we shall find a way to recover them," he said, finally. "The women were making ulung this morning, and when it has become strong enough all the people will have a grand festival. Then the guard may not be kept so strict, and possibly we can escape."

"How long before it is likely to take place?"

"In six or seven days."

"And we are to be kept here all that time?" Dean asked, in dismay.

"We shall be fortunate to get away then, unless the suspicions which these men have can be dispelled, and in order that such may be the case we must not appear unwilling to stay. Act as if a long rest was necessary, and while doing so become acquainted with the country."

"In what way?"

"Do you see those bales of bark on the swinging platforms under the roof?"

"Yes."

"It is sarsaparilla, and has been gathered that it may be sold. That can only be done at the coast, and these people would not try to go on foot. Somewhere, not far from here, the stream widens until boats can be used, or there is another water-way near by. We must know the direction, in order to be ready when the moment arrives. By talking with the young men I can learn where the nearest village is, that we may not pass it during the day. We cannot gain too much knowledge, and the time from now until the drinking of the ulung is short."

This was the sort of talk to revive the boys' drooping courage, and it did them a world of good. They no longer believed the idols were irrevocably lost, and the fact that there was work to be done prevented their thoughts from dwelling upon the possibility that the imprisonment might be made more rigorous.

After some discussion it was decided that Dean should start down stream when the siesta was supposed to have come to a close, and, without paying the slightest attention to whoever might follow, unless absolutely obliged so to do, try to learn where the boats were kept.

Roy was to remain quietly in the village as a sort of hostage, while Tongla proposed to cultivate the acquaintance of those who had swam with the white boys by challenging them to race with him.

There yet remained some time before these plans could be put into execution, and the Indian improved the opportunity by impressing upon his companions' minds the necessity for patience.

"Do not try to learn too much in one day," he said. "We cannot leave here for a week, however well prepared for the journey; therefore move slowly."

Then he explained every detail which it was necessary they should know before an escape could be attempted with any prospect of success, and by the time these instructions had been brought to an end the occupants of the village were bestirring themselves. The siesta was ended, and the work or play began once more.

With an assumption of indifference as to where his stroll should lead him, Dean walked slowly from the house to the woods, entering the thicket some distance from the stream, but moving obliquely in order to strike the water-way about a mile from the village.

Immediately three of the younger men evinced a

great desire to pursue the same course, and Roy said, as he saw them start off in the direction taken by his brother:

"They don't intend that even one of us shall get away. It's foolish to follow him now, for it isn't reasonable to suppose he would attempt to escape, leaving two here."

"Perhaps they believe our coming was only to prepare the way for an attack by the Sukia's messengers, and dog his steps to learn if he meets any one in the forest."

"I hope that is the reason, for if we are to be chased in this manner there'll be small chance of ever giving them the slip."

"After two or three days they may be less watchful," Tongla replied, as he left the building to join a group of half a dozen young fellows who were standing near the stream.

Roy saw him enter into conversation with them, and a few moments later all stepped toward the water, the unemployed inhabitants of the village gathering on the bank in response to the calls of Tongla's companions.

Seated on the edge of the raised platform which formed the floor of the house, that every one could see him, Roy pretended to watch the swimmers with great interest, when in reality he was thinking of their defenceless condition and the poor prospect of ever seeing the Coloney plantation again.

Tongla was sparing no pains to make himself acquainted with and liked by the young fellows. During nearly an hour he remained in the water

with them, and at each exhibition of skill he was beaten—because he chose to be, Roy thought; but the victory was never an easy one, consequently all were in the best of spirits.

At the conclusion, some of the party evidently invited him to accompany them up the stream, for what purpose Roy could not guess, and he started off as if perfectly contented with all his surroundings.

Two hours later, while Tongla was still absent, Dean returned looking weary, as if after a long tramp, and seating himself by his brother's side began a detailed account of the excursion.

"I've found the boats, although they must be as much as two miles away, and at every step I could see that the Indians were close around me. One or the other has kept me in sight all the time, and I hope they're satisfied with the investigations. Here the sneaks come now," he added, as three men appeared from the thicket. "If it hadn't been such hard work I'd have given them a walk to be remembered."

"Does the stream widen as you go down?"

"Another one empties into it, and the two make quite a river—most likely the one Tongla wanted to find, for it flows in a south-easterly direction."

"How many boats are there?"

"Eight or ten; but close by is a shanty in which five or six people are living, and I judged they were stationed at the place to look out for the fleet. Even if we succeed in getting away from here there's not much chance of seizing a craft."

"Did they show any surprise at seeing you?"

"Not a bit."

"How long did you stay?"

"Only a moment. I didn't want it to appear as if I had come simply to look at the boats, so kept straight on about half a mile more. Where's Tongla?"

"Gone up stream with a crowd. Here come the women with our supper, and I'm going to eat out of doors if we can make them understand what we mean."

After a series of the most extravagant gestures Roy succeeded in making his wishes known, and a wooden tray in which was baked fish, together with plenty of cassava bread, was placed before them.

"Whatever else we may do, it is impossible to complain of the food," Dean said, as he began the meal with an appetite sharpened by his long walk. "One could almost fancy they wanted to fatten us."

This was an unfortunate turn in the conversation for the boys' peace of mind. The one thing which had been haunting them was that they were among cannibals, and this reference to being fattened caused both a very unpleasant sensation.

Fortunately they were not left to these mournful thoughts many moments, for before the bread had grown cold Tongla arrived, evidently on the best of terms with his Woolwa companions, as could be told by the manner in which they took leave of him.

He questioned Dean eagerly as to the result of his stroll through the woods, and then said, with a vi-

vacity such as the boys had not seen him display since they left the hacienda:

"The ulung-drinking will take place on the second day. The nearest village is twenty miles away, and the river Dean saw leads to the coast. We must now meet the boat-keepers several times, so we may recognize them if they come to the festival, and make friends with the family who live where we buried the idols of gold."

Tongla was in such high spirits, and seemed so positive they could make their escape, that the boys soon forgot their dismal forebodings, and spent almost a happy evening sitting on the platform discussing plans for the future, when they should be gliding swiftly down the river toward the coast.

As soon as it became dark the old men, each holding a lighted torch, assembled within the circle of stones, evidently for the purpose of holding council, and from the curiosity displayed by the other occupants of the village Tongla believed he and his companions were the subject of discussion, more particularly since the man who had appeared to be their enemy on the previous evening now continued his remarks with great vehemence.

"If there is so much fuss about our staying, why don't they turn us out?" Roy asked.

"Because for fear the followers of Kabul may be near. Those whom I was with this afternoon say the man who is speaking thinks we have come as spies and all the weapons are at the temple, where a battle, if there is any, will take place."

"Then if the Sukia's messengers should track us

here I suppose that would be proof enough that the talkative old fellow is correct in his surmises," Roy said, nervously.

"We would be killed immediately the news of their coming was brought by those who have been sent into the thicket to keep watch," Tongla replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

"That's a cheerful prospect for us," Dean added, with a laugh which was little more than an hysterical cry. "If the men from the ruin catch us we'll be put to death, and in case they so much as make a try for it this crowd will act as executioners."

"They will not come here until after we have escaped," Tongla said, positively. "If it was known where we were the followers of Kabul would be obliged to wait for a larger force, and it will require some days to gather a hundred men, even though the Sukia herself goes to summon them."

Then, observing that his companions were rapidly sinking into a despondent mood, the Indian boy spoke once more of what must be done during the time which would elapse before the festival, and finally succeeded in causing them to forget their fears.

The council was brought to an end at an early hour, as compared with the night previous, and from the manner in which they were regarded by the young fellows Tongla felt certain the suspicious old Indian had not convinced his fellow-officers that the visitors were dangerous characters.

"It is well," Tongla said as they went to the "pen" assigned them. "We will not be disturbed, and in two more days the attempt shall be made."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

PREPARATIONS.

EVEN if Roy and Dean had not been apprised of the fact by Tongla, they would have known that some important event was about to take place from the bustle of preparation everywhere apparent next morning.

The breakfast was served sooner than usual, the time for the bath was curtailed, and each occupant of the building appeared to feel a heavy weight of responsibility.

At a comparatively early hour six men came into the village from the forest literally staggering under the weight of warees, a dozen or more of which were piled on each litter; and as there were three of these apologies for hand-barrows, the amount of meat can readily be computed.

"They must have gone into the thicket last night," Tongla said as Roy asked if the new-comers were strangers. "I am certain I saw two of them yesterday, and if the others had come on a visit we should see the head men greet them formally."

The hunters were evidently about to clean and cook their game, for while some built fires the remainder of the party began carving a number of the animals, for the purpose, as Tongla explained, of curing the meat by means of smoke.

All the women were industriously making bread, grinding maize or crushing cassava, while the girls pressed plantains into a paste known as bisbire, a very palatable article of food, as the boys afterward learned, and one which will remain sweet a long while when formed into rolls and wrapped in leaves.

The old men were engaged in what Dean and Roy believed to be an incantation of some kind. One of the number had brought in a quantity of vines, and when these had been bruised with stones they were placed in large earthen pots over a fire, the Indians gravely walking around them meanwhile.

"What is going on there?" Roy asked, curiously; and Tongla replied, as if the matter was of but little consequence:

"They are only making bequipe, with which to catch fish. Some of the young men have gone down the stream to set a net-work across, and this afternoon fish for the festival will be taken."

"Can we see it?" Dean asked, eagerly.

"I will learn when those with whom I swam yesterday return."

With the exception of the three visitors all in the village worked industriously until the hour for the siesta, and even this time of repose was shortened materially, for the bequipe was ready.

It was yet quite early in the afternoon when every occupant of the building went toward the stream, and, having gained permission to accompany them, the boys followed.

Fifteen or twenty young men were detailed to go

up the river, and after half an hour they reappeared, wading in a line stretched entirely across from bank to bank, beating the water vigorously with long poles. As this party arrived opposite the village the contents of the pots were emptied directly in advance of them.

The beaters continued on their way until fish of all sizes and shapes came to the top of the water, as if dying, and the entire mass was swept along until it seemed as if they were packed solidly between the banks at the rude dam of brush-wood.

Now men, women and children waded in, and began to throw the larger fish on shore, not ceasing the labor until the best had been secured.

These were carried back to the building by the women, the brush-wood dam was removed, and the intoxicated fish were allowed to drift down stream.

"There isn't much sport in that kind of fishing," Dean said, regretfully. "They have killed five times as many as were carried away."

"None of them are dead," Tongla replied, laughingly. "In a little while—half an hour, perhaps—they will be all right. It's only a big drunk, the same as you can see here to-morrow."

"I shouldn't think they would be good to eat."

"There is no more difference in the taste than if they had been taken with a spear, as you shall learn in the morning. We will go back with the men or they may think we wish to run away."

During the remainder of the day cooking was carried on by wholesale, and yet quite as much was laid aside to be put into the ovens of earth

next morning. Tortillas were stacked up like monuments; rolls of bisbire formed a veritable hill in front of the building, and everywhere were pots of ulung placed where they would be most convenient for the feasters.

"Are you certain, Tongla, that there are to be no visitors here?" Dean asked, as he viewed the scene in amazement.

"No one will come, unless the followers of Kabul have tracked us through the forest."

"But it doesn't seem possible that these people can eat all this stuff. There is enough here for a regiment of soldiers."

"The Woolwas make beasts of themselves at the drinking of the ulung," Tongla replied, gravely.

There was no council held on this night. Everyone retired early, as if to prepare for the next day's festivities; and the guests, or captives, whichever they should be known as, would have remained seated on the platform, enjoying the cool night-air, but for an old woman who ordered them into their hammocks without ceremony.

Tongla made a laughing reply to her harsh words, which had the effect of mollifying her anger decidedly, for she actually patted him on the shoulder as he passed her.

"What's the trouble now?" Roy asked, when they were inside the rude apartment.

"She says that we ought to sleep a long while in order to be ready for the festival, and I told her no one could hope to equal a Woolwa in the matter of eating, which was a great compliment."

It seemed to the boys as if they had but just fallen asleep when the beating of drums caused them to spring from their hammocks in alarm; but the instant he was on his feet Tongla appeared ashamed for having allowed himself to be frightened.

"It is the beginning of the festival," he said, with a laugh.

"But it isn't daylight," Dean said in surprise; and looking at his watch, Roy replied:

"Only half-past one. At such a rate they should have begun the spree last night."

"This is the boys' part. After daylight they will be forced to stay outside the building with the women until the dances are finished."

The beating of drums continued with undiminished vigor until nearly sunrise, and then were mingled with the discordant noises the notes as of a flute, produced by a hollow reed with four vents

Now the older members of the tribe appeared, and as if by magic the alleged musicians ceased the din. A roll of bisbire was given to each person by way of breakfast, and then the women proceeded to sweep the stone floor with brooms made by tying bunches of bushes together.

After this had been done, and when the golden rays of the sun were just appearing above the horizon, the old men, each with the inevitable torch in his hand, formed a circle in the center of the building, where, to the monotonous droning of the reed flutes, they whirled around and around in the most grotesque manner until forced to cease from sheer exhaustion.

When the last had seated himself on the floor near the family "pens," or had been thrown there because of his too violent exertions, the younger men, armed with lances, ranged themselves in two lines, each facing the other. They advanced and retreated, brandished their weapons while the drums and flutes were pounded and blown until the din was terrific, and after a mimic battle had been fought all the late combatants joined in the wildest kind of a wild dance.

This closed the early morning exercises, and with the least possible delay preparations were made for the more serious portion of the festival. On the ground about twenty paces from the building, near the bank of the stream, plantain-leaves had been laid down to form a table, and on them was spread the meat cooked during the previous day.

It was not to be eaten immediately, however. The excavations which had been made were refilled with wood, and while this was burning, the warees and fish were wrapped in leaves, preparatory to being roasted.

Since the women were attending to this portion of the work the male members of the tribe lounged around in the immediate vicinity as if enjoying the sight of so much which was eatable, and the white boys, with Tongla, sat on the edge of the platform, to repeat once more the plans already formed for escape.

"As things are going now we sha'n't have much chance of getting into the 'pen' without being seen," Dean said, disconsolately.

"We do not want to make a start before evening, and then you will understand how easily it can be done. The most important matter is to learn whether the boat-keeper has come."

"I saw him a few moments ago, just before the last dance ended, and he had all his family marching behind in solemn state."

"Then they will not return to trouble us. We must join in with the boys and seem to be enjoying ourselves."

"What about those who were sent out to watch for the Indians from the ruins?" Roy asked.

"They are yet in the forest, and must remain there."

"Some may be down stream, where we shall run right into their arms."

"There is no chance of that. Danger cannot come from the river. We have only to fear some of the men have been instructed to remain sober in order to watch us."

"In which case we should stand a poor chance of getting away."

"There is no need to seek for trouble. Let us walk around, and avoid talking together any more than is necessary."

As he spoke Tongla went toward the boys whose acquaintance he had made, and the white lads followed him, feeling decidedly nervous because of the bold stroke for freedom which was to be begun so soon.

There was very little to do or see just at this time. Everyone waited impatiently for the moment when

the feast should be spread, and each was so intent upon the wonderful gastronomic feats he intended to perform that conversation could not be indulged in.

When, however, four warees roasted nearly whole and fully a hundred fishes were placed with the other delicacies, the scene changed suddenly.

The old man who had welcomed the white boys to the village approached the nearest pot of ulung, dipped from it a cocoa-nut shell full of the liquid, and as he raised it to his lips a general rush was made for the other pots or the table. In the twinkling of an eye every person except the prisoner-guests was eating or drinking as if his or her life depended upon swallowing a certain amount in a given time, and the festival had really begun.

It was some moments before Tongla and his friends were able to get the smallest portion of food; but they succeeded after the first mad scramble was over, and when their hunger had been appeased, all three went to the building to watch the performances from the elevation afforded by the stone floor.

The entire population were gorging themselves in the most ravenous manner, and after the novelty wore away the scene became disgusting.

"How long will they keep this thing up?" Roy asked.

"Until it is impossible to eat or drink any more."

"Then this is the whole of the festival?"

"The whole until the ulung makes them so drunk that the fighting begins, and at that time we must take good care to be out of the way, or the old fel-

low who mistrusts us may take it into his head to settle the matter with a blow of his spear. No one is punished for what may be done during the drinking of the ulung."

"That's a cheerful prospect for us," Dean said, grimly; and then the boys watched those around them in silence for some time, until Roy asked, abruptly:

"What are you looking for, Tongla?"

"A drunken man or boy."

"You needn't wait long, for here comes one of the fellows who was swimming with you, and it is about all he can do to stand."

Tongla glanced in the direction indicated, and then ran at full speed toward the young man, who was nearly helpless from the fumes of the ulung.

To their amazement Roy and Dean saw their friend urge the fellow to have more, and even pretend to drink with him, after which the two entered the building, Tongla half-carrying, half-dragging his companion to their "pen."

"What is he putting him in there for?" Dean asked, impatiently. "It can only hinder us if we see a chance to slip away."

Before Roy could reply the Indian boy stood before them, looking triumphant and happy.

"Now we can go back to our old room. If the rightful occupants come it will be only necessary to say a man is in ours, therefore we returned because acquainted with them. It is time to dig up the golden gods. If we wait too long there may be a drunkard on every hammock."

The boys understood now why Tongla had induced the Indian to drink when he was already nearly stupefied, and literally trembling with suppressed excitement, they followed him to the place where the treasure was secreted.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLIGHT.

THE FESTIVAL was now at its height, and but little attention was paid to the white boys, so far as they themselves could judge; but on mentioning this to Tongla as they walked toward the "pen" where the idols had been hidden, he said, pointing to the merry-makers:

"Do you not see that, even though drunk, the men have seated themselves in such a manner that to leave here we shall be obliged to walk over them?"

Roy and Dean had not noticed particularly the manner in which the Indians had arranged the tables of leaves. When Tongla spoke they saw that the feasters were seated in a half-circle, starting from the western corner of the building and ending at the eastern extremity, thus preventing any one in the house from gaining the stream without forcing his way directly through this chain of drunkards.

"It looks like a mighty slim chance for running away," Roy said, after gazing at the scene a moment. "We are completely hemmed in, and they must be absolutely insensible before escape is possible. Since it isn't probable the women and children will get in that condition, we're likely to stay here a long while.

However, it will be something gained if we get the idols."

"The festival is but just begun," Tongla replied, with an expressive gesture, "and before it is ended there may be many changes."

By this time they were at the apartment where the golden gods had been secreted, and there was not a moment to be wasted, for the occupants of the room might put in an appearance before the work was finished.

Tongla began by lowering one of the hammocks in such a manner that the rear of the place would be screened from casual observation, and then said to Dean:

"Get in here while Roy and I raise the stones. Keep careful watch, and give the alarm if any one comes this way."

The boy obeyed, and his companions, each with his machete, attacked the heavy blocks.

From this point Dean had a better view of the feasters than while on the floor. The men were seated as has been said, and the women worked industriously, carrying ulung from one to the other, that there might be no delay in getting drunk, which was evidently the serious work of the day. Each man drained his gourd instantly it was handed him, and while refilling the vessels the women did not neglect to take their full share. The musicians worked industriously, bent on getting noise rather than melody from their instruments; and in a short time the confusion was increased by the feasters, who added their sharp cries to the general din.

Before Roy and Tongla had finished their work, every one staggered to his or feet and began a tipsy sort of dance around the table, in which even the children joined. Now and then some of the party would indulge in what was probably called a song, and as the fumes of the ulung overcame them, others took up the alleged refrain, to prevent the volume of sound from diminishing. If the followers of Kabul had been in the vicinity, the inhabitants of the village might have been vanquished with but little difficulty.

Dean had given, in a low tone, all the particulars of what was taking place; and while the frenzied dance was at its height Roy and Tongla emerged from the gloom, the perspiration streaming from their faces, but looking triumphant, as they displayed the images of gold.

The Indian boy raised the hammock to its former position, and then led the way with all speed to where the drunken Woolwa lay snoring in Roy's swinging bed.

It was now but the work of a few moments to secrete the idols, and the little party had another opportunity of surveying the disgusting scene. The greater portion of the men lay on the ground helpless, and the women and musicians had taken their places, but without any pretense of dancing. They were gathered in little groups around the earthen pots, each drinking as rapidly as possible; and even as the boys watched, the last one fell insensible.

Of all the tribe, only a few small children were in possession of their faculties.

"Now's our time," Dean whispered; "but it's going to be tough traveling at noonday."

"We shall not leave here until after the sun has set," Tongla replied.

"But by that time all hands will have recovered, and there'll be no chance of getting away."

"After lying here in the sun a few hours the effects of the ulung will pass off, and then begins another drunk, for no Woolwa lets the night come on this festival while he can stand. It is the second time of intoxication when we can leave without taking very much risk. By going now our flight would be discovered in two or three hours. If, on recovering their senses, they find us here, there will be an end to any suspicions, and we can feel certain of having a ten-hour start."

"But suppose some of the party don't drink any more after once regaining their senses?"

"There is no chance of that. The next stage will be worse than this."

It seemed to Dean that it would be safer to go while they were certain of the opportunity; but Tongla was really the leader, and he made no further question.

The Indian boy had yet considerable to do before he was ready for the flight. He insisted that Roy and Dean should sit at the entrance of their "pen," in order to prevent any more of the drunkards from finding their way into it, and then he went boldly out where the field was strewn with Woolwas.

Enormous quantities of food were yet remaining, and from the collection he took a dozen rolls of bis-

bire, which was all he could carry at one load. Bringing this back to the apartment, he returned for a smoked leg of waree and two fishes. The third excursion yielded an armful of tortillas, and the food supply had been collected. It was necessary these things should be stowed in such a manner that they could be conveniently carried, and Tongla packed them, with the idols, into the two sacks.

"It's time I did my share of carrying the burdens," Dean said, as he saw that but two bundles had been made up. "I no longer have any fever, and am as strong as when we started."

"You will have a full share. The hammocks, cartridges and both guns make as big a load as either of these. We shall abandon everything else except the chocolate-pot, which, with some chocolate, I am to take."

The boys were not now at liberty to leave their apartment lest some of the less intoxicated might overhaul the baggage or take refuge there, and all sat at the entrance during the time of the siesta, looking out upon the brutes who, with faces upturned to the glowing sun, were snoring vigorously.

It was quite late in the afternoon before the first of the revelers bestirred himself and began industriously kicking or shaking his stupefied companions, until all were seated once more around the plantain-leaf tables.

Such of the women as were able to attend to their masters' wants passed around the gourds, and in a

short time the orgy was in full blast once more. The young fellow whom Tongla had enticed into the boys' "pen" now aroused himself sufficiently to reach the feasters, and during the next two hours the scenes previously described were re-enacted.

Everything was in readiness for the attempt at escape. It was only necessary to wait until an opportunity should occur, and the boys sat in painful suspense watching narrowly every member of that brutish party. If only one should refrain from drinking too much the plan would be a failure, therefore their anxiety can readily be imagined.

It was nearly sunset when the last ulung-drinker capitulated to the insidious foe, and, as before, none save the small children were capable of locomotion. The greater number were plunged into a profound slumber; but here and there some fellow sat upright against one of the huge jars, staring straight before him, and Dean pointed them out to Tongla.

"They don't show any signs of lying down, and before long some of the others may awaken."

"We have nothing to fear from them," the Indian boy replied. "Their eyes are open, but not to see. It is time to go; gather up your load and follow me."

In the shortest possible space of time the fugitives were ready, and Tongla led the way with an assumption of carelessness from that end of the building nearest the stream.

Once a cry caused them to look around in alarm; but they continued on after seeing that it had been uttered by those in a drunken stupor, and Tongla

walked at a slow pace until they were sheltered by the thicket.

"Now follow fast," he whispered. "Those who were watching for the followers of Kabul may come in from the forest to share in the feast, and to be caught now would mean speedy death."

There was no necessity of reminding the boys that they were yet in danger. Neither could feel that the escape was an accomplished fact until many miles separated them from the Woolwas, and both kept pace with Tongla as he ran along the edge of the stream.

Every member of the party was panting and almost breathless when the fleet was reached; but there was no time for rest, and the Indian boy selected one of the small pitpans as the craft to be taken.

All the canoes were drawn high up on the shore; but desperation lent the fugitives fictitious strength, and in a twinkling the little vessel was in the water. It had been hollowed from a solid piece of cedar, the bottom slightly flattened, and the sides only of sufficient thickness to prevent any likelihood of their being crushed in by too sudden contact with a rock.

Safety demanded that the craft should be loaded with care, for a pitpan has an awkward fashion of turning bottom up at the slightest provocation, and Tongla attended to this matter with as much deliberation as if they had plenty of time at their disposal.

"Hurry!" Dean said, impatiently. "At this rate the entire village will be sober before we start."

"It is better to spend a few moments now than run the risk of being capsized just when the slightest accident would be fatal;" and Tongla continued his work until the little craft was properly trimmed.

Not before this had been done did he show any sign of being pressed for time. He directed Roy to sit in the bow, stationed Dean amidships, and then running to the boat-keeper's hut returned with four paddles.

"We will take an extra one in case of accident," the boy said, in reply to Roy's look of inquiry, as he seated himself in the stern and with one vigorous push sent her toward the channel. "We are to paddle for life, and the labor must not cease until we have passed the next village."

The boys obeyed with a will, and the light craft glided over the waters at a rate that promised to defy pursuit.

Night had come; but the light of the new moon enabled them to see the water-way sufficiently to avoid any obstacles, and no one spoke until fully half an hour after the voyage was begun.

"If they don't start in pursuit of us before morning, we stand a pretty good chance of getting away," Dean said, with a long-drawn breath of relief.

"The current must be running at the rate of three miles an hour, and if the next village is only twenty miles away we should pass it a little before midnight; but until that has been done we are not safe," Tongla replied, as he used the paddle yet more vigorously. "There must be no thought of rest until the pitpan is well down the river."

"You needn't fear our wanting to let up," Roy said, with a smile. "Dean and I are too eager to reach the coast to waste any time except when it can't be helped. I wonder if our friends at the village are still carousing?"

"Most likely all are as when we left them; but even if two or three should awaken, they will not be in condition to know whether we are there or not."

Then came another long interval of silence during which the paddles were plied incessantly, Tongla steering from his seat in the stern, and all keeping a sharp lookout for the town where there was rather more than a possibility they might be halted.

"We didn't bring any water," Dean suddenly exclaimed, in a tone of dismay.

"Why should we, when it is only necessary to reach over the side in order to get a drink. The water of the river will be fresh until we are where the tide enters."

"I didn't think of that," and Dean spoke as if ashamed of having forgotten that they must be many days where the supply of liquids would be more than abundant.

As nearly as could he judged, five hours had elapsed, when Tongla uttered a warning hiss as he silently pointed ahead; but strain their eyes as they might, the boys could see nothing. The moon had long since passed out of sight, and the darkness was most profound.

"It is the village," Tongla whispered. "Take in your paddles, and do not so much as move, no matter what happens."

"If you can see anything resembling a building ahead, your eyes must be like an owl's," Roy replied, as he obeyed the command and peered into the darkness.

At the stern Tongla dipped his paddle only now and then, when it was necessary to force the light craft to one side or the other, that she might feel the full force of the current, and before many moments passed both Roy and Dean could see a faint gleam of light on the left bank, which betokened a settlement.

CHAPTER XX.

THE STORM.

SO FAR as could be told in the darkness, this town boasted only of a single building, like the one just left, and the outlines of the house might be fairly discerned by the faint light which came from the smoldering embers of half a dozen fires. It appeared to be very much larger than the other, therefore it was reasonable to suppose the number of inhabitants was greater.

Tongla managed the canoe skillfully. When they were directly opposite the village he had forced her toward the right bank, where the shadows cast by the foliage would prevent her from showing as a dark mass against the lighter water, and under cover of this friendly gloom he gently urged her forward until at least two miles separated them from the town.

"Now paddle," he said in a low tone to his companions. "It will soon be morning, and we must not halt within ten miles."

"Why do you stop at all?" Roy asked, in surprise. "We can hold out for twenty-four hours, knowing how much depends upon it."

"It is not safe to sail during the day. We do not know where the next village is located, and it would be as dangerous to be seen while passing as to meet

any canoes coming up the river. We must remain in the forest except during the hours of darkness."

"But those who will start in pursuit of us can easily paddle further in one day than we shall be able to during the night."

"If they should pass, we must remain hidden until the canoes have come back," Tongla replied, in a tone which admitted of no argument.

When they had taken time to think of the matter the boys understood that their companion's plan was a wise one, and they exerted every effort to send the canoe ahead more swiftly, until the pale gray streaks in the sky told that the sun was about to show his face once more.

Not until the day had fully dawned did Tongla turn the pitpan's bow toward the shore; and then he said, guiding her among a mass of overhanging foliage:

"There can be no danger in stopping here. I will see if it is possible to take the canoe out of the water."

He leaped ashore, was lost to view a moment, and then returned with the cheering intelligence that no better spot for a temporary camp could have been found.

"Pass me the packs, and then we can manage to lift the pitpan without leaving any traces, by pulling her over the branch of this tree."

Ten minutes later the boys were lying in what appeared like a natural camp. Five gigantic logwood-trees stood in a circle, their limbs draped with trailing vines, and in the very midst of these was a

cleared space about ten feet in diameter. Here the pitpan lay, with the provisions stowed under her, and by a few skillful strokes with his machete Tongla had made an aperture in the foliage sufficient to admit of their looking out upon the river.

It was about as snug a place as a party of fugitives could have desired, and for the first time since leaving the intoxicated villagers did the boys feel as if they were really free.

"If it wasn't for the great desire to get home as soon as possible, I could content myself here a week," Roy said in delight.

"It is a pleasant resting-place; but after one day you would wish to leave," Tongla replied, as he unpacked the sacks in order to lay out the food for breakfast. "A little rain, and all the beauty would be gone. Let us eat, and then each take his turn watching while the others sleep, for we must be in condition to do a hard night's work."

The boys were very hungry, therefore Tongla was not obliged to urge them, and all ate heartily of the generous store with which they were provided.

This very pleasing duty ended, Dean took his first trick at watching, with the understanding that he was to keep his eyes upon the river, regardless of the attacks of mosquitoes and other winged pests, for one hour, when his brother would relieve him.

Then Roy and Tongla laid down in the hammocks which had been stretched from one tree to another, and the sentinel could soon hear their very loud breathing, telling that the summons for sleep had been answered quickly.

When half an hour passed Dean saw two Indians paddling up stream in a canoe, and he realized that but for Tongla's forethought they would have been seen by these fellows, and perhaps chased to the next village below, from whence escape might not be possible.

This one craft was the only sign of human life he saw, and when his time as sentinel expired he called Roy.

The latter's watch had but just begun, and Dean was not yet asleep, when the heavens were shrouded with dark clouds as if in a twinkling, and Roy had barely time to cry warningly to his companions, when a thunder-clap which seemed to shake the very earth crashed out the Storm King's defiance. The trees were shaken by the hot puffs of wind which came up the river, and the air suddenly became heated as if from an oven.

Then a flash of lightning which was almost blinding, another terrific peal of thunder, and the rain descended in torrents, drenching the boys thoroughly in an instant, despite the partial protection of the foliage. From that moment the crashing of thunder and the electric glare seemed incessant. It was as if the entire heavens had been rift asunder, and to avoid the painful light Tongla threw himself face downward on the earth.

The boys had heard of the violence of a tropical storm, but until this moment the descriptions they had read seemed overwrought and unreal.

This conflict among the clouds continued for two hours; but the sun's rays could not be seen when it

was ended. The atmosphere appeared to be more sultry than before, and both Roy and Dean began to suffer from raging headaches.

"It is well we found this place, for we are to have a temporal, and here we may be able to rig up some kind of a shelter."

"What is a temporal?" Roy asked, with a look of bewilderment.

"It is what my people call a long time of rain. It may be a week before the sun shows his face again, and we must remain here until it is ended."

"Wet as we are now, it can't make much difference if we keep on," Dean said, with a grimace. "I think paddling the boat would be a relief rather than otherwise."

"It is not the rain we must avoid, but the wind, which shifts suddenly, and the pitpan would soon be overturned."

The boys had already learned that when Tongla made a positive statement there could be little doubt as to its correctness, and, disheartened at the prospect of remaining an indefinite time so near those who had held them prisoners, they set about making such preparations against the storm as were possible.

"The place don't look nearly as inviting as it did when I turned in," Roy said, grimly, "and I'll take back the statement that I'd be willing to stay a week, although we may be obliged to do so. In that time the Woolwas can do about as they please with us."

"If any have started from the village they will

return at once," Tongla replied. "Those who know the river do not care to trust it during a temporal."

"Then the storm will be a sort of blessing in disguise, eh?"

"It aids in our escape," the Indian boy said, gravely; and then he pushed his way among the wet foliage in search of plantain-leaves with which to build a shelter.

It was not a difficult task to find that for which he sought, and in half an hour—before the rain began to fall again—a huge pile had been brought into the clearing. Now Tongla did not appear to think that silence was necessary; he used his machete as a hatchet in felling half a dozen small trees to serve as posts upon which to raise the boat, and afterward chopped into pieces, convenient for carrying, a well-seasoned log.

The pitpan, turned bottom up, was raised about three feet from the ground, the timber set in apeak, and at the back Tongla fastened, by means of vines and brushwood, the broad leaves, something after the fashion of shingles on a roof.

It was a poor shelter in which to remain several days; but, as Dean said, "It went a long way ahead of nothing." If the ground had not already been well soaked with water there would be a possibility of keeping almost dry; but as it was, a wet sponge represents very fairly the floor of the hastily constructed camp. To improve this in some slight degree plantain-leaves were spread down until the whole was covered reasonably well, when Tongla built a fire.

"Ain't you afraid the smoke will be seen?" Roy asked, in surprise.

"There will be no one here. In a temporal the Indian prefers to remain at home, for the river is treacherous. Can you find something with which to wrap the guns? They will grow rusty if it is not done."

Another plantain-leaf was the only thing available, and with both weapons in a green covering they were hung inside the pitpan, the three gods being suspended in the same place by a piece of mohoe-bark torn from the sacks.

Before Roy and Dean finished their work in the camp a cheery fire was burning, and just as Tongla crawled under the not very well constructed hut the rain began to fall—not moderately, as one might expect in the case of a storm which has come for a long stay, but in torrents, like a summer shower.

The fugitives were fully protected from the wind by the gigantic trees inclosing their camping-place, but the swaying of the stout branches told of the gale which might wreck any craft exposed to its fury.

"We shan't have this fire a great while," Roy said, as the rain-drops beat the flames down now and then. "It won't take many hours to soak everything, and there'll be no fuel."

"I only hoped to dry the inside. After to-night we must do without such a luxury; but it will not be cold."

There was no longer any necessity of keeping watch, and during the earlier portion of the day all

hands indulged in the much-needed slumber; but on awakening to find the fire extinguished and the rain still descending in torrents, a sense of general discomfort took possession of the party. Tongla tried to make them more cheerful by recalling to mind the pleasing fact that they were not only free, but so far down the river that the villagers would hardly come in pursuit. There was very much to be thankful for; but the disagreeable condition of affairs remained unchanged, and no one could even put on the semblance of comfort.

At nightfall they ate a hearty supper, and from that time until sunrise tried to sleep, but without much success.

Next morning the storm raged with the same fury as when it commenced; but before the sun set again there was sufficient to cause the gravest anxiety. The river had begun to rise, and as their camp was situated hardly more than six feet above its natural level, there was every prospect they might be forced to seek shelter in the trees.

To cross where the land was much higher would have been in the highest degree foolhardy; the current was running like a mill-race, bearing in its course huge trees, logs, and even large, half-stove boats, to meet which would have crushed the little pitpan like an egg-shell.

The second morning found the water within ten inches of the edge of the bank, and yet the river was rising. There appeared to be no indications that the storm would cease on this day, and Tongla did not think it prudent to delay any longer in making

provisions against the time when the shore should be submerged.

Taking off the loose trousers and blouse which he wore, thus exposing his naked body to the storm, he ascended one of the logwood-trees to learn what might be done.

"We can build a platform among these large branches," he shouted, after a long survey of the surroundings, "and it must be accomplished before many hours have passed, or we shall be drowned out."

"That means we've got to strip and go at it," Roy said, with a laugh. "After being cooped in here so long, a little exercise won't hurt either of us."

The boys were not many moments in preparing to venture out. The fact that there would be no dry clothes to put on necessitated their undressing, as Tongla had done, save that they did not remove their boots, and, with the machetes, both began hewing such small trees as would serve to make a platform.

During two hours they worked with a will, and then, carrying plenty of vines to serve as ropes, Tongla climbed up to the place where the new hut was to be built, the others passing to him the fruits of their labor as wood-choppers. It was late in the afternoon before the task was accomplished, and then the river had begun to encroach upon their camping-place.

A reasonably stout platform had been laid from one branch to another, and above it was a roof which would keep off a portion of the rain.

After the goods—not forgetting the golden idols—were passed up, the canoe was stood on end against the trunk of the tree and bound securely with vines, so there could be no possibility of her being swept away.

Then, when the water was nearly to their knees, the boys clambered into the tree, with but little prospect before them of continuing their journey for several days.

CHAPTER XXI.

PURSUED.

WHEN the boys were finally in the lofty camp, with a plentiful supply of plantain-leaves at hand to repair whatever damage the wind might do, Tongla insisted that each should rub the other until the proper circulation of blood was restored.

For this purpose he twisted the hammocks into the smallest possible compass, and with these towels of cord, which were quite the reverse of soft, the fugitives scrubbed each other until every fellow was in a perfect glow. The partially dry clothes were then put on, and the boys cowered in one corner of the poor shelter to pass the night as best they could.

It was already dark. The wind howled and shrieked among the trees, threatening each moment to blow from its fastenings the frail roof, and below, the water could be heard dashing against the trunk of the tree. The river was no longer confined within its banks, but had overrun the lower portion of the country, converting it into an inland sea.

"If any heavy objects drift this way the canoe will soon be crushed," Dean said in a loud tone, that his voice might be heard above the roar of the waters.

"The other trees will prevent any accident of that sort," Roy replied. "These logwoods form a natural breakwater, and from danger of that kind we are safe. My fear is that we may be driven out of this place of refuge."

"It is not impossible," Tongla said, gravely; and then he let himself carefully down from one of the branches to learn the condition of affairs.

The flood already covered the spot upon which they had been encamped to the depth of three or four feet, and the rain was still falling furiously.

He returned to the shelter without speaking, and understanding that there was no cheering information to be imparted, his companions refrained from asking any questions. They feared to know the worst.

The continued moisture had affected all the food save the bisbire. The fish and waree meat was spoiled to such an extent that they did not take either with them into the tree, and the tortillas had been converted into a sort of paste, which was far from pleasing to the taste. If the temporal continued two days more they would be without food, and while the surrounding country was flooded no more could be obtained.

Until midnight the boys were in a most wretched condition both mentally and bodily, and then to their inexpressible delight the rain ceased to fall. One by one the dark clouds floated off into the east, and the stars shone out as if with increased brilliancy because of having been screened from view so long.

"The storm is over!" Tongla cried in delight. "To-morrow the sun will show his face once more, and by steering with great care to avoid floating obstacles, we can resume our journey as soon as it is light."

"I thought you were afraid to travel in the daytime?" Roy said, in surprise.

"That was before this flood came. Now the people living near the river will have plenty to do trying to save their property and we need not fear."

"What about the danger of being swamped?"

"Listen! Can you not tell that the wind is being hushed to rest? By morning the only thing to fear will be such objects as the waters have swept away, and skill with the paddle is needed. The river runs much swifter than before, but the waves are subsiding."

Any change must be for the better, and the knowledge that they would be on their way to the coast in a few hours caused the boys to forget, or let pass unheeded, present discomforts.

Slowly the hours went by until the gray light of day appeared in the eastern sky; but it was not until the sun had risen that they could distinguish surrounding objects, because of the dense foliage which inclosed them.

When it was possible to see, the prospect was far from cheering. The entire forest appeared to be submerged, and fully one-half of the canoe was under water.

Once more Tongla threw off his clothes, and, machete in hand, leaped down from the tree to cut the

boat adrift. In a very few moments this task was accomplished; and then he righted her, bailing out the water with his hat.

The day gave promise of being excessively warm. Already the heat was so great as to be uncomfortable, and the slightest exertion caused the perspiration to flow profusely. The fugitives' clothing was dried on their bodies as quickly as if subjected to the heat of an oven, and the hut among the branches looked really inviting, now that they were on the point of leaving it.

The guns were in a sorry condition; thickly coated with rust, one might well have believed they had lain at the bottom of the river for a month, and, with nothing in the shape of oil, it was well-nigh impossible to clean them.

"They are of no more use than a club," Roy said, as he took them from the plantain-leaves. "It would be a good deal like committing suicide to discharge one; and what makes the matter worse, I don't see how it will be possible to get them in working-order again."

"When the river returns to its proper level we can shoot some animal with arrows, and the fat thus obtained will take away the rust."

"I guess that's about the best that can be done; but it'll be rather tough on us if we need them before any hunting can take place."

It was of no use to mourn over the fact, however, and Roy laid them in the stern of the boat, while Dean lowered down the now scanty stock of provisions.

The day was hardly more than an hour old when everything had been made ready for departure. Tongla took his old seat in the stern, the others were stationed as before, and all hands pulled at the branches or pushed with the paddles until the little craft was out of the forest.

Once where the influence of the current could be felt the pitpan was whirled down stream with great rapidity, turned first in one direction and then another by the eddies, until it seemed certain she would be capsized before the voyage was well begun. Tongla's skill as a helmsman served them in good stead, and after some sharp work he succeeded in heading her properly.

"We must paddle now," he said, "for unless the pitpan is forced on faster than the current she cannot be guided."

Roy and Dean worked manfully, while the Indian boy had quite as much as he could do to steer, and the canoe raced toward the coast at the rate of not less than six miles an hour.

That the navigation was decidedly dangerous, and the slightest inattention on the part of the helmsman would result in shipwreck, could be told by the floating objects everywhere around. Here an entire tree, whose submerged roots or branches threatened to overturn the frail craft, was avoided only after the most violent exertions on Tongla's part. There a half-sunken log, drifting sidewise, showed itself directly ahead, and every swirling eddy threw some obstruction in the fugitives' course.

"There'll be no more night-work until the flood is over," Roy said, as Tongla, exerting all his strength, sent the canoe off at an angle in order to pass clear of half a dozen bushes, large enough to swamp the voyagers. "These things couldn't be seen in the darkness, and the trip would come to an end before it was begun."

"The flood should mean safety for us," the Indian boy replied. "Unless they know why we are going down the river, those whom we may meet will not try to stop us, and the coast must be very near when the waters are at their former level."

"What is to be done after we arrive at Bluefields?" Dean asked; the rapid pace at which they were traveling causing it to seem as if the end of the journey was very near at hand.

"All our troubles will be over then. We shall find an American Consul there, and he will make the necessary arrangements for sending us home. I don't think we need begin to worry about that part of the journey yet, for there are many miles between here and the coast."

During this conversation all the boys were working vigorously, and Roy had hardly ceased speaking when Tongla said, in a low, sharp tone:

"Paddle now for your lives. Here is a village, and we must pass it before the men have a chance to shoot."

Looking up quickly, the boys saw what appeared to be quite an important town. It boasted of four long buildings instead of one, and was situated on a small hill; therefore the rising waters had done no

injury save to some fields of maize near the bank. Judging from the accommodations, and admitting that each house had as many occupants as the one from which they were escaping, it was reasonable to suppose there were three or four hundred people living here—a supposition which caused Tongla no little uneasiness.

"I was a fool to think all the villages were flooded," he said, bitterly. "There is nothing to prevent these Indians from coming in pursuit, since they must be better boatmen than I, and there is no lack of canoes."

Fifty or sixty pitpans and dorys were drawn up on the bank near the houses, all apparently ready for use, and even Roy and Dean understood that pursuit was probable. They were near enough by this time to see a crowd of men and boys gazing at them intently, and there seemed little chance the strange craft would be allowed to go past without a satisfactory explanation.

"Do not pay any attention to them," Tongla said, nervously. "Paddle with all your strength, but try to avoid the appearance of being in a hurry."

It was rather difficult to obey this last order; but the boys attempted it by taking a longer stroke than usual, and refrained from gazing at the town.

Swiftly the little craft approached. A large throng gathered near the shore, as if expecting a landing would be made, and when there was no evidence of such intention after the pitpan had arrived opposite the settlement, the men set up a loud shout, probably intended as a command to stop.

Tongla replied in his native tongue, pointed up stream as if to call their attention to something which would soon be seen, and then sunk his paddle in the water until the handle bent like a bow.

"What did they say?" Roy asked.

"I do not know," the Indian boy replied. "I have told them the followers of Kabul were close behind, and while they are expecting to see enemies we must force the pitpan as she never went before."

Down the river, at a speed which caused the water to boil and bubble under the bow, danced the little craft, the helmsman running her dangerously near the drifting logs and trees rather than lose time by giving them a wide berth; and when two or three minutes had passed, Tongla said:

"They are launching five of the largest canoes, and the women are bringing bows and spears to the men. They intend to chase us and be ready to fight the followers of Kabul if any appear."

Roy glanced over his shoulder for an instant, and saw that his companion had spoken only the truth. Even now one of the canoes, in which were six men, had pushed off from the shore, each of the crew bending to a paddle, and with such odds against them the pursuit could have but one ending.

"How long will it take them to overhaul us?" he asked, speaking as if the sight of danger had suddenly dispelled his fears.

"We have a good start, and may keep ahead half an hour," Tongla replied, thoughtfully. "If the forest was not flooded we might escape by landing on the opposite side."

"If we had delayed to clean the guns properly they could have been stopped at once," Dean said, regretfully. "Why not try a shot as it is?"

"The weapons are so rusty that an explosion would be almost certain. When they are within arrow range and we can see no possible means of escape it may be as well to run the risk, but not now," Roy replied.

Another backward glance showed that the second canoe had started in pursuit, while the other three were being pulled up stream to intercept those who were supposed to be coming down.

"Your lie has saved us from being chased by all hands, even if it does no other good," Roy said, grimly. "With but one of the guns in good condition we could make a big difference in the appearance of affairs."

"I have my bow and arrows."

"That is true; but when it becomes possible to use them they will have the same advantage."

After this nothing was said for several moments. The boys were straining every muscle in the effort to keep ahead, but were already tired from previous labor, while the pursuers had entered the race fresh.

Nearer and nearer came the big canoe. The Indians were overhauling their intended prey rapidly, and unless something happened to favor the fugitives the chase would soon be ended.

"You must use the guns now, whatever happens!" Tongla said, between his tightly-closed teeth, as he saw the men in the foremost boat fitting arrows to

their bows. "It is better to die fighting than be carried back to those who will kill us slowly."

"Pass the guns forward!" and Roy's face was pale as death. "I will try the first shot, and if the barrels hold, Dean can take a hand."

Extracting the cartridges, which were held quite firmly by the rust, Roy replaced them with fresh ones, and said to Tongla, as he knelt in the bottom of the craft:

"Don't pay any attention to me, but attend to the boat. The gun will probably kick badly, if nothing worse happens, and you must guard against capsizing."

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Nearer and nearer came the big canoe. The Indians were overhauling their intended prey rapidly.—(See page 207.)

CHAPTER XXII.

STRATEGY.

EXCEPT that their situation seemed about as desperate as it well could be, Roy would not have thought of discharging his gun while in such a rusty condition. Now, however, it appeared to be the only hope, for if it did not explode, the pursuers might be kept at a distance.

Kneeling on the bottom of the boat, with the weapon resting upon the rail, he took careful aim; but before it was possible to press the trigger an exclamation of delight burst from Tongla's lips, and Roy looked quickly up to learn the cause.

A short distance ahead, on the right bank of the river, was a small but very swift stream which ran off at an angle as if connecting with some other body of water, and the Indian boy said, as he worked the paddle yet more vigorously to force the pitpan's bow into this new channel:

"Do not take the risk of firing yet. This stream is so shoal that the other boats cannot follow, and we may escape."

"But if it leads into the river again at a point further down, as seems to be the case, we shall only find ourselves in a trap."

"You will at least have time to get the guns in

working order, and with them we can beat those Indians off."

"You're right!" Roy exclaimed joyfully; and, dropping his weapon, he seized a paddle, using it with such energy that the light craft was soon entering this new water-way, while the pursuers were not yet within range.

A shout of triumph from the occupants of both the large crafts told that Roy's surmises were correct. At some place well known to the enemy the stream probably found its way into the river again, and the boys would be shut in completely.

Tongla did not look at all disturbed when the canoes were paddled straight on without so much as an effort to prevent the fugitives from thus making a detour, and Dean cried, bitterly:

"We might just as well have surrendered at once, for now the game is over."

The Indian boy made no reply. This small water-way ran through high land which was not yet submerged, and when they were a dozen yards from the mouth he headed the light craft for the shore at a point where a clump of palm-trees grew close by the edge of the stream.

"What are you stopping here for?" Roy asked, impatiently.

"You shall see," was the reply, as Tongla sprung ashore, pulling the pitpan high up on the bank. "Come with your machetes and help me chop down these palms."

"If anything of that kind is to be done we should work from the other end, where the men will try to

ascend. This will only result in shutting ourselves up more completely than before."

"There is no time to talk. Try my plan and all may be well. Delay, and they are certain to take us prisoners."

While speaking Tongla had begun to chop at one of the trees with feverish energy, and Roy did not wait longer. He remembered that thus far the Indian boy had suggested nothing which did not result favorably for them, whereas he and Dean had often found themselves mistaken, therefore he urged his brother to make haste by crying, sharply:

"Turn to, here, Dean. One poor plan well carried out is better than two or three half-done."

At the end of ten minutes there was a regular bridge, formed by six palm-trees, stretched across the stream, and Tongla got into the boat again, urging the others to follow without delay.

"I will paddle while you clean the guns as well as possible; but do not speak nor make any noise."

"If you are going to keep on down the stream it looks very much as if we were doing our best to run into that crowd. They'll surely come up if we don't show ourselves at the other end."

"I hope so; and now remain silent."

By observing the formation of the land Tongla could get a pretty good idea of how near the river might be, and while the boys hurriedly swabbed the barrels of their guns with wet handkerchiefs tied to the ramrods, he kept the pitpan in the outer edge of the current, where it would be possible to land without delay at any moment.

Once during this queer voyage Roy raised his head as if to speak, but a warning gesture from the helmsman caused him to remain silent, although he felt positive the boy was making a fatal mistake.

Half an hour passed. The high land was sloping down toward the natural level of the river beyond, and again the canoe was turned toward the shore at a point where the foliage was thickest.

"Get out," Tongla whispered, as he ran the pitpan among the leaves and vines; and when Roy and Dean had obeyed he followed, pulling the little craft entirely on the land.

When this was done he crouched among the tangled vegetation, forcing his companions to do the same, and remained silent and motionless.

"This is the most senseless proceeding I ever knew him to be guilty of," Roy said to himself. "He must think those fellows are fools if we can remain here hidden very long. Soon all the men in the village will be hunting us out like rabbits in a clover-patch;" and he would have spoken his thoughts if Tongla had not pressed one hand over his mouth.

While he tried to release himself the noise of paddles was heard, and he ceased struggling as both canoes passed on up the stream at full speed, the occupants taking no heed as to whether they might be heard by their intended victims.

When the foremost craft was directly opposite the boys' place of concealment she was hailed by those in the rear, and Tongla looked decidedly happy when he heard the reply.

Then the boats passed; but the Indian boy did not so much as move for ten minutes, when he whispered to Roy:

"Do you think the guns can be used now?"

"It will be possible to fire three or four rounds without any danger."

"Come; and work as you never worked before. This lot of palms are to be cut down, as were the others, and the blows must be delivered quickly."

Even now neither Roy nor Dean understood what their companion hoped to effect; but this ignorance did not prevent them from obeying the orders with the utmost haste.

Near where the pitpan had been dragged ashore stood a veritable thicket of palms, and here Tongla pursued the same tactics as before. Wielding the machetes with a celerity which would have been impossible under other circumstances, they felled five trees of such size that the stream was spanned, and the butts and tops extended some distance in-shore on either side.

"Now quick, and we are off!" Tongla cried, ceasing work only when the voices of the enemy could be heard a short distance above. "We can carry the pitpan around the bridge."

The little craft was not heavy, and the three boys made short work of the task. Before those who were returning down the stream had appeared in view the boat was in the water once more, and Tongla said, as he took his old seat in the stern:

"Shove off, Roy, and then sit in the middle with

your gun ready for use. Dean, paddle the best you know how."

"But those fellows can bring their boats through the woods exactly as we did," Roy said, as he obeyed; and the light craft, under the impulse of both the oar and the current, dashed on down the stream like a feather on a mountain torrent.

"Their boats are too heavy and too large to be carried as this was," Tongla replied, in a tone of satisfaction. "It would be impossible to get them between the trees, and our bridges must be cleared away before they can get out. I was afraid they might work at the first obstruction we made, but that was not done, and it will be many minutes before the chase can be continued."

"Why am I sitting here instead of paddling?"

"Look ahead—near where the stream joins the river. There were only five men in each of the boats, and the crews numbered six when they left the village. By counting I knew two had been landed, to make sure we didn't double back, and also to shoot from the bank when we came past. Hold your gun ready to fire, and I will hail the sentinels."

Roy could see the Indians near the water's edge, preparing to send their arrows aboard, and looking decidedly surprised at seeing the boys, when it was probably not thought possible they could pass the other boats without being captured.

Tongla shouted a few words in a warning tone as the pitpan came within hailing distance, and to the surprise of both Dean and Roy the men lowered

their weapons submissively, making not so much as a threatening gesture.

"Now take up the paddle and work," the Indian boy cried, when they were in the river once more. "If we can hold out to do our best for half an hour, the danger will be over."

"I'll guarantee to jump at it twice as long as you wish. A trick like that prevents a fellow from feeling tired; but what did you say to those men?"

"I told them you had the iron which shoots twice, and promised that both should be killed if they raised their bows. The gun could be seen, so the threat had some influence, and their fears settled the rest. They must have thought the gods were with us if we could come down the stream without being taken prisoners by the ten who went in the same direction."

"The whole thing was done mighty well, and after this I'll never stop to ask a question, whatever you may attempt to do," Roy said, with a laugh. "I couldn't see any way out of what looked like a regular trap, and thought you'd suddenly lost your senses."

"It wasn't certain the plan would succeed. If their canoes had been smaller, if one boat-load had stayed near the mouth of the stream instead of landing those men, or if they had not paddled up so far, we should have failed. It was a chance only, but turned in our favor."

"What if it had failed?"

"We could have carried the canoe across the land

to the river, and during the march found some game which would have yielded fat enough to clean your guns, and then put off at the most favorable moment. This was the best, for we will be nearly out of sight when they get past the logs."

"I should say it was the best," Dean replied, with a laugh. "We shut them up like cows in a pasture, and then walked off in great shape."

"It is not certain yet that we shall be able to walk very far," Tongla replied, as if he feared his companions were boasting too soon. "If we are a long distance ahead when they come out, the chase may be abandoned."

This was a delicate hint that they should not spend their breath talking when it was necessary every nerve must be strained to send the pitman ahead, and the white boys so understood it, for neither spoke again until fully half an hour had passed, when Tongla finally said, in a tone of relief:

"We can afford to rest, now that it is so near noon. The enemy are not in sight, and it seems certain they have returned to the village."

"It's time we slacked up a little, for I have paddled until it seems as if my arms would drop off;" and then Dean made haste to add: "I'm willing to work a good while longer, though, so that we are headed for the coast."

"But you won't get much chance to rest, Tongla," Roy said, as he and his brother threw down their paddles, while the former was forced to work nearly as hard as before in order to avoid the many

obstacles in the way. "Don't you believe we'd better haul up awhile?"

"I was thinking to do so. We need food, and grease enough for the guns; therefore when a spot not yet submerged is found, we will take our siesta."

For such an opportunity the voyagers had not long to wait. Within half an hour from the time Roy and Dean ceased paddling, the canoe was opposite a long stretch of high land, and the helmsman headed her for the shore.

In case the Indians whom they had left should be in pursuit, and also in case boats might come from below, the pitpan was lifted out of the water and carried into the thicket, Tongla returning to erase, so far as possible, the footprints from the bank.

Nothing was done toward making a camp save to sling the hammocks. The tortillas were spread out in the sun to dry, the golden idols were hung against a tree as if they also needed the sunlight, and then all hands laid down without the formality of standing watch.

The river was now so broad that one boat could no longer block the passage, and whether a craft passed up or down Tongla determined to resume the journey after the weapons were in order, trusting that it would be possible to fight their way through.

Believing they were safe for the time being, the fugitives gave themselves up to the sweet repose of sleep.

It was four o'clock before either awakened, and

five minutes later everything was in readiness for the hunt which Tongla proposed to make.

At first Roy insisted that he and Dean should accompany him; but the Indian objected, because one must be left in charge of the boat and treasure. Therefore, after a short discussion, he set out alone.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

HUNTING.

TONGLA was not long absent from the encampment. Before his companions thought it possible that he had reached a spot where game might be found he returned with four fat quail, and immediately proceeded to cover them with mud, preparatory to baking.

"There is plenty of game here," he said. "By spending one day enough can be shot to keep us in food until we arrive at the coast, and it would be wise to take our provisions now while there is time."

"Do you think it is safe to stay so near those whom we outwitted?" Roy asked, anxiously.

"They will think we have kept on, and it may not be possible to find another place so good as this. The villages are nearer together as we approach the sea, and we shall not dare to stop at any of them."

"Do as you choose;" and Roy laughed to think he should so soon have forgotten his promise. "I said I never would question again what you might do, and here I am at the same trick within a few hours after you got us out of the scrape so nicely."

"We can stay until food for the trip has been secured, and each moment the flood will grow less.

By to-morrow night it should be safe to go down the river after dark."

There was no further discussion on the subject, and while Tongla dug the hole which was to serve as oven his companions put up a slight roof of plantain-leaves over the hammocks to protect them from the dew.

The fugitives were not so bold as to build a fire while it was yet light, and when the former work had been completed the Indian boy proposed a regular hunting excursion.

"It is not here as it was in the forest before we reached the river," he said. "The vegetation is less dense, and this headland is surrounded by water, so there can be no chance of losing our way."

"Then we'll both go with him," Dean said, excited by the prospect of a hunt, even though they were yet in such peril.

"The guns must not be used," Tongla replied; "but there is nothing to prevent your coming. We can put the boat and the golden gods out of sight. It will be better so, although I do not believe any one is likely to come until the river is lower."

The pitpan was dragged into a clump of bushes, the idols were hidden beneath a fallen tree, the guns concealed in the same place, and the little party started toward the middle of the headland, where Tongla declared game would be found in great abundance.

Before they had walked twenty yards the Indian boy stopped, and said, as he pointed straight ahead, with a look of satisfaction:

"There is a cabbage-palm; to-morrow we shall have vegetables with our meat."

"I don't understand how you are going to get them here, no matter what kind of a palm that is," Roy replied, laughingly.

"You will see in the morning;" and before Tongla could say any more a covey of what Dean thought were red partridges settled with a great whirring of wings among the undergrowth, a short distance in advance of the hunters.

Motioning for his companions to follow his example, the Indian crept cautiously ahead, under cover of the vines and plants, until the birds could be seen feeding upon a small red berry or plum, which grew at that particular place in great abundance.

Dean and Roy saw their companion fit an arrow to his bow, draw it to the very tip, and an instant later one of the birds lay dead, with not so much as a flutter of its wings.

The others in the covey did not appear to take any notice of this sudden death, and five times Tongla drew his bow, a bird falling at each shot, before the stupid partridges were sufficiently alarmed to fly away.

"At this rate we shall be ready to leave here in the morning if we feel so disposed," Dean cried, joyfully, as he gathered up the game. "A bow and arrow goes way ahead of a gun, and we must practice with them, Roy."

The Indian boy showed no signs of pride. That he should hit the mark at such short range was

nothing more than natural, according to his ideas, and this sort of hunting was very tame sport.

Dean ran back to the encampment with the spoils of the chase, after the arrows had been removed, and when the first fruits of the excursion had been deposited in the pitpan the three pushed on further into the thicket.

Five minutes later two fat curassows were added to the list, and then Tongla saw that which caused an expression of joy to come upon his face.

It was nothing more than a well-beaten path among the bushes, and covered with queerly-shaped footprints; but after examining them closely the Indian said, in a tone of most intense satisfaction:

"The road has been made by a tapir; now there will be no lack of meat, and we need not waste our time killing birds."

"I don't see how you figure that any time has been wasted, when we have got game enough already to provide us with food sufficient to last three or four days," Roy replied. "According to my way of thinking, it has been a very successful hunt even if we don't get anything more."

"But we shall have a tapir, which is better than all I have shot. You must help me to chop down some of these trees. They will check him, and with the spears he can soon be killed."

"Have we got to build a regular pen?" Dean asked, fancying the labor might be too great a price to pay for a single tapir when birds were so plenty.

"No; anything which will stop him in the path is enough. He will not try to go around; but on see-

ing us, he will make every effort to break through, when the spear can be used."

"Why not run the risk of being heard and use the guns?"

"A bullet would hardly go through his hide, and the shot which you have could do little more than tickle the animal. The spear and machetes are the best; but we must take care he does not get past us, for a tapir swims as well as an Indian, and once in the water we should never taste his flesh."

"Then show us what to do, and we will begin work," Roy said, impatiently. "There are not many hours of daylight remaining, and this thing can't be managed very well in the night."

Tongla's plan was not an intricate one. He marked three trees on either side the path that were to be felled in such a manner that they would form an angle with the point in the direction of the camp, and the boys began the task, laboring industriously until nearly sunset, when it was finished.

Then he led the way back to where the hammocks had been slung, explaining that the tapir would not venture out until late in the evening, and there was plenty of time to complete in a leisurely manner the remaining preparations for the hunt.

It was now so nearly dark that there seemed little chance that the smoke of their fire could be seen, and Dean was installed as cook while Tongla and Roy converted two of the machetes into spears by lashing them firmly to a stout sapling.

The quail were roasted to a turn when the laborers were ready for supper, and the Indian

method of cooking was highly appreciated. They came from the coals looking like lumps of well-baked clay; but on breaking these balls open the skin and feathers were found adhering to the covering, and the delicious white meat was exposed to view.

"Save the fat for your guns," Tongla said, as Roy and Dean began the feast with well-sharpened appetites, and before the meal was concluded they had enough to clean half a dozen weapons.

It was about nine o'clock when the hunters set out, Tongla carrying his short spear, and the others armed with the lengthened machetes. The moon, although in its first quarter, gave sufficient light to disclose surrounding objects, and since the forest at this point was not very dense the tapir's path could be seen with reasonable distinctness.

"We shall hide until he comes," Tongla explained as they approached the barricade, "and when I give the word you are to thrust with the machetes until he is dead."

"The chances are that he will show fight, I suppose," Roy said, with a perceptible tone of apprehension in his voice.

"Not at all. His only desire will be to get away, and that we must prevent, for in his body is as much meat as we shall need this side the coast."

It was difficult for Roy to believe an animal as large as Tongla represented the tapir to be would not do something in defense of himself, and the fact that they had no other weapons than the improvised spears troubled him considerably. It was too late to draw back now save at the expense

of being thought a coward, and he took his stand in the thicket at the right of the path, as the Indian indicated. Dean remained with him, while Tongla stationed himself directly opposite.

"Do not even breathe loud, and when I give the word, come out in such a manner that he can be attacked from behind."

These were the final directions, and then Tongla vanished from view without a sound to betoken his passage through the thicket.

During the next hour the boys remained in ambuscade, not daring to move save when fatigue forced a slight change of position, and both had begun to think their companion was mistaken in regard to the habits of the animal, when a heavy but rapid tread could be heard some distance up the path.

Dean clutched his brother by the arm as if fearing he had not heard the noise, and in another moment a large, drab-colored animal, with a tail like a pig and an abbreviated trunk instead of a snout, came at a swinging, awkward trot directly toward the fallen timbers.

He turned neither to the right nor the left, but crashed into the ambuscade, where he tried in vain to force a passage.

"Come on!" Tongla shouted, as he leaped from his place of concealment and began making furious thrusts at the beast with his spear. "Move quickly, or he will succeed in breaking through!"

Roy and Dean were at the tapir's side in an instant, and as the former tried to cut through the animal's thick hide with the point of his machete

he realized how useless would have been a charge of shot in such an encounter. It required all his strength to penetrate the flesh, and after one unsuccessful thrust he shouted to Dean:

"Strike hard! The skin is like leather, and an ordinary blow will amount to nothing."

It is doubtful if the white boys unaided would have succeeded in even disabling the animal. None of the wounds inflicted by them appeared to have any effect on him, and he was on the point of breaking down the obstruction when Tongla drove his spear directly through the tapir's body from side to side.

The awkward animal fell to his knees with a grunt, and then rolled over dead, greatly to the joy of his executioner, who indulged in a fantastic sort of dance expressive of pleasure and triumph.

Now that the tapir had been killed, it was a task of no mean magnitude to carry the carcass to the camp. Tongla began by disemboweling him, and then divided the flesh into quarters, to each of which a rope of vines was attached, after which the hunters dragged the portions where the hammocks had been slung.

The Indian boy's first care was to skin the head, wrap it in leaves, and then dig a large hole in which it could be roasted. Roy and Dean brought fuel, built the fire, and when a large quantity had been reduced to coals the not very inviting-looking flesh was put upon them and covered with an unusually high pile of earth.

"Now we must smoke the rest of the meat," Ton-

gla said, as he turned once more to the carcass. "Dig five or six ovens like this one and build small fires in them, while I cut up the body."

Since every fellow knows how game is cured by smoking, it is unnecessary to go into details; suffice it to say that the entire night was spent in the work, and even then the Indian declared it was not finished.

"We must stay here twenty-four hours longer," he said, "because it is not safe to keep the fires going, now that the day has come. We will have the tapir's head for breakfast, and then I'll weave some sacks of mohoe-bark in which the meat can be carried."

Despite all Tongla had said regarding the delicious quality of the roast, neither of the white boys thought it particularly good. It was not to be despised, by any manner of means, for they were as hungry as they were tired, and all ate without stint.

When the meal came to an end Roy and Dean set about putting their guns in order, for the supply of grease was more than abundant, and in an hour the weapons were as serviceable as before the temporal.

During this time Tongla had gathered a quantity of mohoe-bark, and was weaving bags for the smoked meat, when Roy proposed that they lie down for awhile.

"You shall sleep until noon, and then I will take my turn," the weaver replied; and since this would be but a just division of guard duty, the white boys at once sought the needed repose.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DISAGREEABLE NEIGHBORS.

WHEN Roy and Dean awakened, Tongla had not only finished his task of weaving bark sacks, but was gathering wood with which to continue the work of smoking the meat as soon as night should come. The birds were incased in mud, that they might be cooked at the same time, and nothing remained to be done until after the sun should set.

Both had had quite as much sleep as was needed, and in the absence of anything better to do they sat just within the thicket watching the swiftly-running river, but seeing no signs of human life until, when the shadows were beginning to lengthen, Tongla arose.

From that time till morning each boy had plenty to do. With seven or eight fires to be attended to, neither of which was allowed to burn brightly, but simply to send out the largest possible quantity of smoke, all were kept busy. When the flames rose too high water was sprinkled, by means of a wet branch, to deaden them, and this portion of the work required incessant attention.

The game was cooked during the earlier part of the night, and the laborers made a delicious mid-

night meal and breakfast from one of the curassows.

The sun was just rising when the last pieces of tapir were taken from the fire and packed in the bags of mohoe-bark. Apparently everything was in readiness for departure, and Dean was about to drag the pitpan from the bushes, when Tongla proposed that they go back for a cabbage-palm, which, until this moment, had been forgotten.

"We can cook it at the next place we stop," he said, "and it will make the meat taste better."

It surely seemed like a willful waste of time, more especially since they had plenty of provisions on hand; but neither Roy nor Dean thought it well to object, because their companion was so eager to procure the dainty.

Under ordinary circumstances the Indian would have climbed the tree in order to procure the edible portion without destroying the palm; but that there might be less delay he felled it, and from the vase-like protuberance at the top of the trunk cut a white core or pith eight or nine inches in circumference. It looked not unlike a raw turnip, and Tongla assured his companions that when roasted with meat no vegetable had a more delicious flavor.

Now nothing remained to be done, and the little party walked rapidly toward the pitpan, Dean, from force of habit, glancing toward the river when they approached the thicket.

"Look! look!" he cried in a low, sharp tone. "There is a canoe which appears to be headed directly for this place!"

The information was well calculated to startle his companions, and running to the very edge of the foliage, they peered out. A boat in which were five men was being pulled up stream, and from the opposite bank, the occupants evidently intending to land near where the boys were concealed.

"Can it be that those are the same men who chased us through the stream?" Roy asked. "They might have passed in the night and are just going back."

Tongla gazed long and earnestly before replying, and then said, slowly:

"This canoe has come from far down the river; they look like Rama Indians, and if so, are going to the ruins to celebrate the festival of the sacred serpent."

"Is there any chance they would try to stop us if we started before the boat got here?" Roy asked, anxiously.

"It would not be safe to show ourselves. Have your guns ready; we can beat them off if they discover us and attempt to do any mischief."

As he ceased speaking Tongla ran with all speed to the scene of their late culinary operations, covered the ashes with the sand which had been taken from the excavations, tore down the frames which had been used for hanging the meat, and in every way consistent with the speed necessary, tried to give the place an air of long abandonment.

When he finished and crept once more into the thicket where the boys were crouching by the side of the pitpan, the canoe was but a short distance

from the shore; but the current had carried her some distance down stream, and it was evident she would be beached about twenty yards from where the fugitives lay.

"Are you going to trust to the chance that we can remain hidden here?" Roy asked, when the Indian lay down by his side.

"There is no other course to pursue, unless we are willing to take the risk of a fight on the water. We shall be able to hold our own here with less danger because of the protection afforded by the trees. It is possible they will not come up as far as this if the landing is for the purpose I think."

"What is that?"

"We shall see," was the evasive answer; and then the strangers were so near that it was no longer safe to indulge in conversation.

At the point where the canoe was run ashore the land sloped gently down, and there were no trees to obstruct the view of those in hiding. They saw the men step gravely ashore, seat themselves in a circle as if the only purpose in landing had been to rest their limbs, and then light loosely-rolled cigars with a splinter of some resinous wood which one of the party had set on fire after making a series of the most grotesque bows and grimaces.

"It is as I thought," Tongla whispered, softly. "They are the worshipers of Votan on their way to the ruined city, and have stopped to prepare themselves for the holy task."

So far as the boys could see, this preparation consisted chiefly in smoking at a furious rate, and for

the next two hours nothing else was done. No conversation was carried on among them; but each puffed sedately, lighting a fresh cigar as fast as one was consumed.

"It begins to look as if we shouldn't leave here this forenoon," Roy whispered impatiently, as the ceremony, if such it could be called, was continued.

"They will not start until after the siesta," Tongla replied. "The end is approaching, and then all will lie down."

As the Indian boy spoke the eldest of the party took from the bow of the canoe a horn, curved like a ram's, and as he did so the others threw off their loose cotton blouses, thus exposing the upper portion of their bodies.

The priest, or head man, whichever he should be termed, drew from his girdle a short knife, holding the horn in his left hand, and as the first Indian in the circle stretched his arm upward a quick cut was made on the fleshy portion, the blood running quite profusely into the horn held to receive it. In a like manner each member of the party was treated, and then the priest slashed his own arm until the ensanguined fluid spurted out and mingled with the rest.

This done, and while the horn with its contents was held high in the air, the entire party joined in what sounded very like a chant, each man keeping time with the arm from which the blood was yet flowing.

It was a weird and by no means pleasing-looking spectacle. The voices sounded harsh and threaten-

ing, and both Roy and Dean felt decidedly relieved when it was brought to a close by all rising while the priest touched the forehead of each with the horn, after which he threw it far out into the river.

This performance was followed by another prolonged smoke, and then, as Tongla had said, all lay down on the ground as if to sleep. At least three hours had been spent in this mummery, and the heat was now so great that any very active exercise was out of the question.

"They will remain there the entire time of the siesta," Roy said, in dismay.

"It will be well for us if they spend it in that place. Should we be discovered, all would know we had witnessed the offering to Votan, and would consider it their duty to carry us to the ruins that the crime might be atoned for."

"I thought those who worshiped Kabul were the ones who had a right to the ruins. How is it that these people can go there?"

"In this country are many gods; but those who visit the buried city have stated times, and when Votan is to be worshiped the followers of Kabul will go back to the range."

"Perhaps one of the idols we found represents the god they worship," Dean suggested; and his brother replied, impatiently:

"Now don't try to find trouble. Owing to this multiplicity of gods we are in a bad scrape already, and I don't want to so much as fancy that it might be worse."

"But it will be if those fellows happen to take a

stroll up this way after they awaken. Don't you think it would be a good idea to leave this section of the country? We could find plenty of chances to hide by starting now."

"Then if they did come this way we should not only lose our boat, but all the meat we have spent so much time preparing. I think our best plan is to stay right here, and if we are discovered fight for the property, without which we stand precious little chance of ever reaching home again."

"That is what must be done," Tongla added, and Dean had no further suggestions to make. He would have preferred to leave such a dangerous locality, but since his companions were opposed to the plan there was nothing more to be said.

The boys had a long, weary time of waiting, and the possibility that on awakening the Indians might discover their whereabouts did not tend to make them feel any more cheerful. The mosquitoes swarmed everywhere around, and not daring to move very much, the little party were bitten until Roy's and Dean's faces and hands were swollen terribly. Tongla would have brought out some of the provisions, that they might have lunch; but his companions were in such a condition of mental anxiety that food seemed distasteful.

Slowly the hours wore away. The time of the siesta was drawing to a close, and just when Roy began to fear their disagreeable neighbors might conclude to remain all night one of the party awoke. He started to his feet as if to walk along the shore, and the white boys grasped their guns; but there

was no occasion to use them then, for after a moment of hesitation the man turned to arouse his companions.

In a few moments the worshipers of Votan were standing on the bank conversing in low tones, and even Tongla looked disturbed because of the unaccountable delay.

Finally the canoe was pushed off, the men clambered in, and with steady, powerful strokes began to propel her up stream.

"Well," Dean said, with a long-drawn sigh of relief, when the boat was so far from the shore that his words could not be overheard, "this is about the worst day I have spent since we left home. Sitting still, waiting to be attacked, and not daring to so much as brush a mosquito from one's face, is more trying than a regular battle."

"It makes a fellow feel mighty good to have a chance to stretch his legs;" and Roy tramped up and down behind the trees at a furious pace. "When is it safe for us to start, Tongla?"

"Not until they are out of sight."

"It'll be nearly dark by that time."

"So much the better for us. There is not much floating in the river now, and for many hours the moon will give light enough for us to see the way."

"At least let us get the pitpan into the water. That will save just so many minutes."

Tongla would not allow a movement to be made outside the thicket; the risk of being seen was too great, and he had no idea of bringing a new set of enemies upon them. The boys dragged the idols

from their hiding-place and wrapped them in leaves, so that in case any stranger chanced to get a glimpse of the pitpan's bottom the treasure might appear the same as the provisions; and so much care was bestowed on this work that when it was finished Tongla believed the journey might safely be resumed.

To carry the light craft to the river and load her with the generous supply of provisions delayed them at least half an hour longer. Then the voyagers stepped aboard, and once more the current was bearing them toward the coast.

"We've got about three hours of daylight, and if you conclude to sail until the moon sets a good many miles should be covered," Roy said, bending to the paddle as if the exercise was a pleasure. "What is to be done if we come to a village?"

"Trust to our strength in case it is yet light, and after dark try to slip past under the shadow of the opposite bank."

CHAPTER XXV.

TONGLA'S STORY.

WHEN they were well under way, and being carried down stream by the current even faster than they could have paddled, Tongla advised his companions to work moderately in order that they might be comparatively fresh in case of another pursuit.

"If I had not urged you to make every effort to force the boat ahead, we might have outstripped those who gave chase from the last village without being obliged to spend so much time in the small stream," he said. "Now we will do little more than keep the pitpan in the current, and if other enemies spring up we shall be in condition to run away from them."

Acting under this advice, the boys did not exert themselves save at such times as it was necessary to swing the little craft around suddenly in order to avoid some obstacle in the river, and this portion of the journey was more like some pleasure excursion than a flight from vengeful enemies.

After an hour had passed and the dreary time of waiting for the worshipers of Votan to depart had been partially forgotten, Roy and Dean grew hungry. Some of the roasted meat was set out, and

all hands partook of a hearty meal, after which they were in fit condition to enjoy what was really a charming sail.

The undulating country on either side of the river was covered with foliage to the very edge of the water, owing to the flood, and everywhere were bits of color from the gorgeously-hued birds or brilliant flowers, like jewels set in green enamel.

Beautiful though the scenery was, the eye, grown accustomed to the many changes, soon tired of it; and as the coming night caused the forest to send out long masses of black into the river, the elation of the white boys was turned to something very nearly approaching despondency. At such a time conversation seemed necessary, and, tired of discussing their chances of reaching the coast in safety, Roy said, abruptly:

"Before coming here, Dean and I read a great deal about this country, Tongla, and it appeared as if your people have been used mighty rough."

For fully a minute Tongla remained silent, as if repeating to himself the many acts of cruelty which had been told by father to son, thus keeping alive the enmity against the hated Spaniard, although centuries have elapsed since the most atrocious deeds were committed.

"The one aim of the white man has been to kill the Indians, that the rightful owners of this most beautiful land may not rise to punish the murderer and thief," he said at length, in a tone such as the boys had never heard him use before. "Many years ago this country, under the wise rule of my fore-

fathers, was like the gardens your people delight to see around their haciendas. From the lagoons to the great lake the Indians were happy, rich and peaceful. Then came the Spaniard. It was as if those with dark skins were less than the fierce dogs the invaders brought with them. Knowing little of war, because we had never fought among ourselves, the white men easily conquered, demanding gold as the ransom for a life, and slaying women and children for the pleasure of seeing blood flow.

"Gold, corn and slaves were demanded at stated times from every cazique, and a cruel death followed if the tribute was not paid. Thousands and thousands were sent away in chains each year, to be sold like hogs. Hundreds were killed; not as we killed the tapir, that he might serve for food, but to gratify the desire which the conquerors felt to witness the death-struggles. Shall I tell you of one merry-making which the Spaniards had at Leon? It was many years ago, but the Indian will always remember as if it were yesterday. Two Spaniards left the city to extort fresh tribute from the unhappy ones in their power, and during the journey they were murdered by members of their own party.

"Although the rightful rulers of the country had no hand in the murder, seventeen caziques were taken from different portions of the country and carried to Leon. There, in the public square, each was armed with a stick and told to defend himself from the dogs which were to be set loose. Powerless, as against the white men's wickedness, the brave Indians stood shoulder to shoulder surrounded by sol-

diers, and with the conquerors as spectators. That they might not die too quickly, the young and untrained dogs were at first freed, and for half an hour the cruel sport was continued, my ancestors having been torn and mangled, but not killed. Then the older brutes were set on, and the Spaniards enjoyed the scene until the victims were dead and their bodies half-eaten. Even then the usurpers were not satisfied, but refused to allow the dismembered bodies to be buried until the fourth day, when the stench was so great that they feared some terrible plague would come upon them, and the mass of decaying flesh which had once formed noble men was shoveled like offal into a hole.

"It is such deeds, which I could recount until we reach the coast, never ceasing for want of more to tell, that has made the Indian a slave, and you cannot wonder why those who have been driven into the forest look with distrust and hate upon a white skin. My people will not always be slaves; the day shall come when you may seek in vain from the mouth of the San Juan River to the Bay of Fonseca for one drop of Spanish blood."

It would have been impossible for anyone to hear these words without feeling the deepest sympathy for the abused people of this beautiful country, and the white boys were deeply moved. It was not in their power to speak words of cheer, for the strength of this once mighty nation had been broken; but, leaning over, Dean laid his hand on Tongla's in silent sympathy, and the latter pressed it long and warmly.

During the next half-hour hardly a word was spoken; amid a profound silence the canoe sped swiftly on, the light of the moon causing it to look as if she were sailing over a river of molten silver, and then Tongla said, as he pointed ahead to where it appeared as if the waters ran directly beneath a high cliff:

"That is the home of the river god. He has built up the hill that none may pass through save by his consent. I have been told that the channel is full of rocks, and we must remain on this side until morning."

The voyagers were within sight of a deep canyon, much as if at some time the river, having been diverted from its natural course, had cut its way directly through the center of a hill, and the roaring of the waters told how full of danger must be the passage, now that the flood prevented the obstacles from being seen.

They could already feel the increased strength and velocity of the current, and the narrow way looked so dark and forbidding that the boys were only too glad to make a halt.

It was nearly midnight; in four or five hours the new day would come, and then the journey could be resumed.

Now all hands were forced to exert their full strength at the paddles to force the pitpan out of the current, and only after a most severe struggle was the little craft beached, hardly more than ten yards above the dark portals of the gateway.

"Are we to stand watch?" Roy asked, when they

had stepped on shore and drawn the canoe high up on the bank.

"There is no reason for it. The Indians do not remain near this place at night, for it is believed the river god claims for his victims all who venture here after the night has come."

"He'd surely have a good hold on any one who tried to go through there in the darkness," Dean said, nervously, as he tried in vain to peer through the gloom which shrouded the sinister-looking place. "Must we go in there? Wouldn't it be possible to carry the pitpan over the hill?"

"It is difficult for a man with nothing in his hands to ascend the cliff, and if the pitpan was only half as large we could not take her across. When my people come up the river they drag the canoes with a long rope by making their way over the top and pulling from this side, for the distance is not long."

Positive that no enemy was lurking in the vicinity, Tongla built a fire, that they might be free from the winged pests by lying or sitting in the smoke, and the boys gathered around it to sleep or talk, as they chose.

After awhile the roar of the torrent became familiar, and one by one they fell asleep, not to awaken until the sun's bright rays fell full on their faces.

Naturally the first glance of each was toward that narrow strip of foaming, seething water, and the view was quite the reverse of cheering. Imagine a river a hundred yards wide, and overflow-

ing its banks because of a flood, suddenly narrowed to twenty or thirty feet, and some idea may be had of the passage through which the boys must pass in order to reach the coast.

"Our craft wouldn't live a minute in that terrible place," Dean said, with a shudder. "I had rather set her adrift and make my way over the cliffs, with the chance of picking her up on the other side, than attempt to sail over those rapids."

"It is only necessary to steer carefully," Tongla replied. "If you and Roy lie flat in the bottom I will take her through safely."

"I had rather try to go over the range alone, despite the followers of Kabul, who may be waiting for us, than trust myself in the canoe on such a torrent."

"You can climb the cliff, and I will wait on the other side until you come."

This was an arrangement which both Roy and Dean would have been only too glad to make; but it savored so much of cowardice that the former instantly rejected the plan, although he was eager to spare his brother the mental suffering consequent upon the short journey.

"Could Dean find his way over the cliff alone?" he asked.

"Yes; but he could not reach the opposite side until late in the night, and it is possible we may find Rama Indians below waiting for the waters to subside before they come up."

"Then you think that it would be dangerous to stay on the other side, if only for one day?"

"I do; but if Dean does not wish to go through on the pitpan we can remain until he arrives, unless there are too many for us to hold in check."

"I'll settle this discussion," Dean said, quickly, and with an effort to appear unconcerned. "It is foolish for me to be frightened I will go in the canoe, and if anything happens we shall at least be together."

"It is well," Tongla replied, gravely. "In ten minutes we shall be through, floating on the broad bosom of the river, and no accident will happen."

The journey was delayed only until the Indian boy made some chocolate, and a hurried breakfast of cold roast curassow had been eaten, after which preparations were made for the perilous passage. Now Tongla was more particular than ever in regard to the stowing of the cargo. A single misplaced package might cause a wreck, and twice was every article taken out to be replaced differently before he felt satisfied.

The large idol was placed in the bow, and the smaller ones aft, with the provisions packed snugly around them; while underneath all, in the center, were the weapons.

"You are to sit in the bow with a paddle, to be used in case it is necessary," Tongla said to Roy. "Do not dip in the water unless I give the word, and then remember not to lean over the side. Sit perfectly straight, whatever happens, that all the weight may be in the middle."

The pitpan was lying along the bank, held in posi-

tion by Dean, who had quite as much as he could do to prevent the current from wresting her out of his clutch upon the rail, and in obedience to Tongla's instructions, Roy stepped aboard.

His weight caused the little craft to careen, and this movement invited the catastrophe.

As the bow swung a few inches from the land the stern was forced out so violently that Dean could not retain his hold. He had only time to utter one despairing cry, and before Tongla could leap to his aid the light craft, depressed at the bow, was swept away by the current.

"Do not attempt to rise!" the Indian boy shouted as Roy, looking ghastly pale, made a movement to change his position. "Lie down! For your life, lie down!"

Dean was so terrified by seeing his brother carried into this mad vortex that he did not know whether the command was obeyed or not. Although in no way to blame, it was to a certain degree because of him that the terrible accident had happened, and, seized with a vertigo of fear, he fell like one dead.

Tongla, paying no heed to his companion, saw the little craft whirled twice around as she reached the middle of the foaming stream, and then dash straight as an arrow down the awful incline.

Roy had covered his face with his hands as if to shut out from sight that terrible scene which it seemed could only end with his death, and was being carried backward when the walls of the cliff shut him out from view.

Tongla stood gazing at the spot where his friend had disappeared as if unable to move. Horror was expressed in every feature, and his lips were livid as he muttered:

"It is the vengeance of the gods!"

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CHAPTER XXVI.

OVER THE CLIFFS.

HOW LONG he remained staring into the narrow passage stupefied with fear Tongla never knew. It must have been quite a while, however, for he was only aroused from the lethargy when Dean revived sufficiently to ask:

"Is he dead?"

"When the waters swept him around the bend in the wall he was alive and unharmed. But come; we must not stand here! He may have been flung ashore if the pitpan capsized, and his life can be saved, perhaps, if we reach him in time."

Even as Tongla spoke he realized that there was no possibility they could make their way over the cliffs before nightfall; but it was as well Dean should believe his brother might be aided, for the journey was long and difficult, filled with dangers such as would require something more than fear for his own safety to urge him on.

All the provisions were in the boat, and they had no vessel in which to carry water, therefore it would not be possible to eat or drink during all the long hours which must elapse before the task had been accomplished.

It was necessary to restrain Dean rather than urge him on. The Indian had not ceased speaking when the almost distracted boy started toward the cliff without heed as to whether he struck the trail or not.

"Wait!" Tongla shouted, as he ran to overtake him. "It must be there is a path here, and unless we find it we may go so far astray that to reach him before morning will be impossible."

"Lead the way and I will follow; but move quickly, for every moment is precious now," Dean replied, his voice so choked with sobs that the words sounded strange and indistinct.

Tongla set about the task with deliberation, realizing fully the truth of the old adage that "haste makes waste," and after walking to and fro at the base of the cliff several times found that for which he sought.

It was the faintest of trails, but sufficient to point out the course to be pursued, and the ascent was begun at once.

To travel with any degree of speed up the almost perpendicular face of the hill was impossible. The boys were obliged to pick their way carefully around one projecting spur, or make a long detour where a smooth wall of rock forbade further progress in that direction, and oftentimes clambering where the slightest misstep would hurl them into the torrent below. During the first three hours they had ascended not more than half the distance to the summit, and as he stopped for an instant to regain his breath Dean said, mournfully:

"It will be night before we reach the valley beyond, and no matter how much Roy may need our aid, we shall arrive too late."

"There is nothing which can be done save to ascend the hill. I have great hopes we shall find your brother safe. The pitpan had turned until the stern, which was raised high out of the water, went through the rapids first, and it is as reasonable to suppose she floated clear of all obstructions as that he has been thrown out. The flood has covered the rocks with water, therefore we have only to fear the trees which may have lodged there."

Dean found nothing in these words to give him hope. He could not believe any craft would pass over the roaring torrent without a helmsman unharmed, and that Roy was even now dead or dying seemed certain.

He did not allow himself to continue the halt any longer than was absolutely necessary, and then the difficult journey was continued up, up among the rocks where the noonday sun beat down pitilessly upon their unprotected heads. Not a breath of air was moving, and the heat threatened to put a speedy end to the labor if it were not ceased for a time.

"We must stop," Tongla said, at length. "To keep on while the god of light is so high in the sky will be to fall exhausted, and Roy would wait for us in vain."

At first Dean refused to listen to such advice; but when another hour had passed it was literally impossible to proceed further. The thirst which assailed him was worse than he had known in the

ruins, and his brain whirled until he could no longer distinguish surrounding objects.

"Doesn't the rain-plant grow here?" he asked, feebly.

"Not in the hills. Chew some of these leaves; they will moisten your mouth."

Tongla handed him a small bunch of green which he had gathered from time to time during the painful journey, and after some difficulty the distressed boy succeeded in finding a little relief, although his thirst was not assuaged in any degree.

Dean lay under the shadow of a rock in a semi-unconscious condition until the sun had sunk so far in the western sky that the hill sheltered the boys from its rays, and then the march was resumed.

An hour later they were at the summit, looking eagerly for some signs of Roy, but nothing could be seen.

Dean moaned in his grief, and Tongla said, soothingly:

"It does not prove that he is dead because we can see nothing of him. The forest is so dense in the valley that a hundred boys might be encamped on the bank of the river and yet we be unable to see them."

"But the Indians? You feared there might be some waiting to come up."

"They could travel faster than we have, and if any were on the way we should have met them before this. The road is not so difficult now, and we shall soon be at the river; but be careful of your steps, for a fall from the ledge would be fatal."

Now that the descent had begun the task was not as laborious; but it required the greatest caution. Each moment the heat became less intense, and, despite his thirst, Dean revived as he descended.

Moving in a zigzag course, to guard against a fall, the boys continued the journey until they were two-thirds of the distance down, when a faint cry attracted their attention.

"Was that a bird?" Dean asked, as he came to a full stop.

Tongla hesitated about saying exactly what he believed it was until a small object could be seen running along the river-bank, and then he cried, excitedly:

"It's Roy! He's safe! He's safe! Look near the water and you can see him plainly!"

In another instant Dean had distinguished his brother's form, and he shouted for very joy as he waved his hat vigorously.

Roy responded by the same gesture, and Dean cried, as he started at full speed:

"Come on, Tongla! I can't really believe he has escaped from that torrent until I have my arms around him."

"There is no question about its being him, and I advise less haste, or he will be the mourner. A single misstep and it will be impossible to put your arms around any one."

Dean moderated his pace somewhat, although he continued with more speed than was consistent with safety, halting not till he and his brother were embracing each other, as if after a long absence.

"How did you get through that terrible place alive?" Dean asked, hysterically.

"I can't tell. There was hardly time to realize the danger before the pitpan was floating on the river below, and I had nothing more serious to do than paddle her to the shore, which was such a job that it wasn't finished until I was two or three miles from here. Then I dragged her among the bushes, as we did night before last, slung the hammocks, buried the idols, hung the meat where the animals couldn't get at it, and came up to see where you were."

"Wasn't any damage done?"

"Not a bit; we came through as well as if Tongla had steered; and, what is more, we didn't ship so much as a drop of water."

By this time the Indian boy had arrived, and to him Roy repeated the short story he had just told Dean.

As a matter of course Tongla was delighted at meeting the companion whom he feared was dead; but he did not express as much joy as Dean thought proper.

"One would think you were not particularly glad to see him," he said.

"I can never be more happy than I am now; but I am troubled for the future."

"What is the matter?" Roy asked, anxiously. "Did you see anything on the mountain which looked suspicious?"

"So far as I know there is no cause to fear, save for that which we have with us."

"What *is* the matter, Tongla? Don't let's wear long faces when we should be rejoicing at Roy's escape from what seemed certain death."

"I fear the vengeance of the gods," the boy replied, solemnly, and looking around quickly as if fearing to see some startling proofs of their displeasure.

"Vengeance of the gods?" Roy repeated, in perplexity. "What do you mean? If I believed in your gods I should say they had shown themselves particularly well disposed in allowing me to come down the rapids in safety."

"That was done to show you what they could do. Did you ever know of so many disasters in such a short time as we have had since the golden gods were stolen?"

"Now see here, Tongla"—and Roy spoke in a decided tone—"I don't like that word 'stolen.' We found the figures where they had been lying no one knows how many hundred years, and it surely was not stealing to take them away. I will admit that we've had many misadventures, but if we'd never seen the idols there would have been no difference since we left the ruins."

"We shall not see the hacienda again if the gods are not given to those who will worship them."

"I can't believe, Tongla, you really mean that," Roy said, earnestly. "If I were disposed to listen to you, how do you know who their worshipers are? You never saw such figures, and they have probably been long since forgotten."

"We can throw them in the river, and thus free

ourselves from the vengeance," Tongla replied, with a certain doggedness.

"I don't intend to give up so much treasure because you are superstitious," Roy said, firmly. "That three images of gold, which we can melt or beat out of shape at will, have any influence upon us is ridiculous, and it isn't well to discuss such a foolish subject."

"As you please," the Indian boy said, quietly; but both Roy and Dean could see that his belief remained unchanged. "Shall we go now to the camp? It will be dark in an hour."

Roy led the way down the river, feeling decidedly disturbed in mind because of the stand taken by his companion. It might lead to very serious difficulties in the future; but yet he could see no way to convince him of his error, save by repeating over and over again that which he had already said many times.

The sun was sinking below the horizon when the boys arrived at the camp on the banks of the river, and those who had made their way over the cliff felt the necessity of both food and rest.

Tongla made a generous pot of chocolate, warmed one of the roasted partridges by a small fire, and after a hearty meal Roy proposed that the two who had worked so hard should take the rest they needed.

"I have done next to nothing to-day," he said, "and can stand watch as well as not. Neither of you are in a condition to resume the journey, and we will stay here quietly until morning."

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEAN'S MISHAP.

DEAN and Tongla certainly did need a long rest after their fatiguing journey over the cliff, and neither made any protest against taking advantage of Roy's proposition. In a very few moments both were sleeping soundly, while the sentinel paced to and fro in front of the fire which had been left burning as a slight protection in case of a visit from wild beasts.

The rushing of the waters drowned the ordinary noises of the forest, therefore those peculiar sounds which had caused even Tongla to be nervous could not be heard, and the night watch was robbed of its most disagreeable feature.

Roy did not arouse either of his companions until nearly two o'clock, when he called Dean, saying, as the latter rubbed his eyes vigorously to insure their remaining open:

"If you stay on duty an hour, and then awaken Tongla, it will not be hard for either, while I shall have sufficient rest to brace me up for to-morrow's journey. There really doesn't seem to be any reason why any one should stand watch; but I suppose it should be done in case of fresh arrivals."

"Of course we are to leave here at sunrise?"

"Earlier, if possible. Tell Tongla to get breakfast just before daylight, and we can leave at the first signs of dawn."

Then Roy threw himself in his hammock, and Dean was virtually alone, the roar of the waters coaxing his sleepy eyes to close. He sat in front of the fire until he found himself on the verge of dreamland, and, realizing the danger of slumbering at his post, began to pace to and fro, as Roy had done.

The fire was burning low, and this gave him an opportunity of arousing himself. He gathered dry wood here and there in such a manner as would require the most exercise, and in doing so strayed some distance from the rays of light. It was where the gloom prevented a good view of the surroundings that he saw what appeared to be a dry branch divested of foliage, and without the least thought of danger picked it up.

In another instant the sleepers were awakened by a shrill cry of pain and terror, and on leaping to their feet saw Dean standing near the fire, ghastly pale, hurriedly baring his left leg.

"What is the matter?" Roy asked, excitedly. "Did you see something that frightened you?"

"Look out! You're walking directly over him! I have been bitten by a snake."

Now both Roy and Tongla could see that which Dean referred to, and, seizing his machete, the latter cut in two pieces with one dexterous stroke the long, writhing strip of brown which was wriggling its way toward the hammocks.

"Is it a poisonous snake?" Roy asked in alarm.

"A rattlesnake," was the ominous reply; and then Tongla cast one hasty glance at the wound. "Help me to dig a hole," he cried, using the machete as a spade, and Roy lost no time in obeying the order.

An excavation sufficiently large to contain the injured limb was soon made, and, seated on the ground, Dean allowed his leg to be covered with the fresh earth to the depth of twelve or fifteen inches after a ligature had been placed below the knee and above the wound to prevent, so far as possible, the virus from infecting the blood.

"It would have been better if we had left the golden gods instead of the guaco," the Indian boy said, bitterly. "We have brought away the treasure and left that which was of far greater value in order to reduce the burdens."

While speaking he was hastily lighting a piece of resinous wood, and when a torch had thus been made he added:

"Remain with him while I am away, and force the boy to talk. He must not grow sleepy, nor will it be safe to give anything to drink until the tea has been brewed, if, indeed, the gods permit that I shall find what we have wickedly wasted."

Dean was thoroughly frightened; but otherwise there appeared to be no change until five minutes had passed, when he began to experience great pain.

"It surely seems as if we were not to reach home together," he said, sadly. "Perhaps Tongla is

right, and we have done wrong in bringing away the idols."

"Don't talk about not getting home," Roy said, in an agony of apprehension. "He *must* find the guaco, and it cannot be that there will be any more serious results to the accident than the severe pain which is sure to follow. Keeping up your courage is more then half the struggle; and for mother's sake, if not for mine, you are bound to fight against this thing."

"Of course I will do that, Roy; I know by my feelings when you were carried through the canyon how terrible it would be for the one who was left if death should end the flight. The pain is growing intense, though, and if Tongla doesn't come soon it will be too late."

There was nothing Roy could do to hasten the return of the boy upon whom they relied so fully in this time of deadly peril, nor would the words of cheer come to his lips, for his hope that the poison would be neutralized had now grown very faint.

For five minutes more the brothers sat clasping each other by the hand, and to one, at least, each sixty seconds seemed like an hour. Then the Indian returned with a handful of purple leaves, saying hurriedly, as he approached the fire:

"The gods have been good; I found the most effective of the three varieties. Wash the chocolate-pot quickly."

Roy darted with all speed to the bank of the river, while Tongla crushed in his hands the herb on the efficacy of which Dean's life depended.

"How much water do you want?"

"Bring the pot half-full," Tongla replied; and an instant later it was on the fire, while both the boys heaped dry wood around it, that the virtue of the leaves might be extracted in the shortest possible time.

Instantly the odor of the guaco was perceptible a generous portion was poured into the canteen and the pot replaced on the fire again, Roy insisting on his brother's drinking while the liquid literally burned his throat.

The tincture was weak; but yet the effects were noticed within five minutes from the time it had been taken. Dean's eyes grew brighter, and the stupor which could already be perceived gave place to increased animation.

"It seems as if I felt that stuff in every vein," he said, and from the tone of his voice one understood that hope, which apparently deserted him a short time before, was returning.

"Is the pain as bad?" Roy asked, solicitously.

"It seems to be growing worse; my knee is beginning to ache."

"That is well," Tongla replied, joyfully. "If the guaco is to cure, the pain must increase. When the tea is a little stronger we will give you another drink, and unfasten the cord from your leg."

"Perhaps that is what makes my knee ache."

"The guaco struggles against the poison, that is all;" and Tongla appeared to be so well pleased with the symptoms that Roy felt wonderfully encouraged.

Ten minutes later half a pint of the hot infusion was administered, and without taking the limb from the earth the Indian boy removed the ligature, when Dean's sufferings were increased tenfold. Fortunately he was not fully conscious; it seemed as if the tea intoxicated him, and he talked at random until a third dose had been poured down his throat, when he sunk back in a sort of lethargy.

"It is well," Tongla said, gravely. "The guaco has conquered, and it will only be necessary that he recover from its effects. He must not be moved for twenty-four hours at least, and we cannot safely stay here, where the Woolwas or Ramas may come at any moment."

"Have we got to make another long halt?" Roy asked, in dismay.

"There is no help for it. His life would be in as much danger as it was half an hour ago, if we put him on the pitpan where the guaco could not be given regularly until noon."

"Of course that settles it," and Roy tried to speak cheerfully. "We can't stay so near the bank of the river, and the sooner another camp is made the better."

"I will attend to that. Remain here; if he awakens give more tea until he falls asleep again, and do not let the leg get uncovered."

The light of dawn was rapidly dissipating the gloom, and Tongla could make his way through the thicket without the aid of a torch.

"Is it safe to wander around without so much as a light?" Roy asked, and the boy replied:

"There cannot be any wild beasts near here. The gods have warned us by means of the snake that the golden figures should be returned, and they will not send any more trouble until we neglect to do their bidding."

"Now don't get back on that foolish strain," Roy said, petulantly. "You know, as well as I, that we have only taken metal, not an image to be worshiped; and there can be no question of replacing them, even if it were possible."

"It has been spoken, first among the Woolwas, then in the flood, again at the cliff, and now the snake. Is it not enough?"

"To induce me to carry those idols back? Certainly not. All these things would have happened if we had given them up to the Sukia and then followed the same course."

Tongla did not reply. The sound of some one making his way through the foliage told that he was pushing straight back from the river, and Roy could not repress a sigh as he thought of what might be the result if the Indian should insist on retracing his steps to deliver the images of gold to those who had demanded them.

"We couldn't go on without him," he said to himself, "and it would be little less than suicide to return now."

These dispiriting thoughts were interrupted by a movement on the part of Dean. The unconscious boy attempted to turn on his side, an action which would have forced the wounded limb from the covering of earth, and Roy held him firmly with one

hand as he administered with the other a fourth dose of the guaco.

It was rather a difficult matter to do this successfully while Dean struggled to prevent it; but he managed after a time in doing as he wished, at the expense of spilling nearly half the contents of the pot, and his brother had sunk once more into a condition of profound lethargy when a piercing scream, mingled with a hoarse growling, came from the thicket.

"Tongla! Tongla!" Roy shouted as he leaped to his feet, seizing at the same instant one of the fowling-pieces.

"Help! The jaguar!"

The voice sounded stifled, but full of agony, and with a mental prayer Roy dashed into the undergrowth at full speed, shouting encouraging words, but hearing nothing more until, on bursting through a clump of bushes, the sound of a struggle could be distinguished, apparently close at hand.

For an instant he stood undetermined how to proceed. It was impossible to say exactly where the animal lay, and quite probable that by advancing at random he would find himself seized, as Tongla had been.

"Help! help!" came from the foliage almost directly in front of him, and he hesitated no longer.

Forcing his way through the tangled shrubbery he reached a small clear space between two gigantic trees, where a beast four or five feet long, of a tawny color spotted with black, was snarling and

growling over what might have been mistaken for a bundle of bloody rags.

As Roy appeared the animal turned half-round, but in such a position that the boy did not dare to discharge the weapon lest he should hit his friend.

Moving cautiously to the left, Roy hoped to find the desired opportunity. The jaguar moved also, and the condition of affairs remained unchanged.

"Why do you not fire?" Tongla asked in a low tone, as he tried to reach his machete, which lay a few feet from him; but the beast rolled him back with one paw as a cat plays with a mouse, keeping its head turned toward Roy meanwhile.

"If I should shoot now, some of the shot would be sure to strike you."

"Better that than to be killed by these teeth. Fire, and pay no heed to me!"

It was not probable Roy could kill the jaguar with such cartridges as his gun contained. The most he hoped for was to wound the animal sufficiently to draw him from his victim, and then finish the battle with the machete.

"I shall fire," he said, sharply. "Roll out of his reach, if possible, when I count three, and get hold of your weapon."

"Quickly! Shoot quickly; he is crushing my life out!"

During this short conversation the beast stood gazing at Roy, switching its tail to and fro angrily, and the boy dropped on one knee as he counted, rapidly:

"One, two, three!"

"Quickly! Shoot quickly; he is crushing my life out," Tongla cried to Roy.

With the last word he discharged both barrels, almost at the same instant, and it seemed as if the noise of the discharge had but just rung out when he was thrown to the earth by a heavy body, while his face was covered with some hot liquid.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HUT IN THE WILDERNESS.

WHEN Roy next realized anything he was lying on his back a few feet away from the dead jaguar, and close by Tongla sat, trying to staunch the flow of blood from many ugly-looking wounds.

"Did the small shot kill him?" Roy asked, in surprise, as he rose to his feet.

"They struck him full in the eyes, and as he leaped against you I managed to give one thrust with the machete. We have nothing more to fear from him. Are you wounded?"

"I don't think so," the boy replied; and then, as he saw the ensanguined liquid which completely covered his garments, he added, "It seems as if something must be the matter, else where did so much blood come from?"

"The greater portion probably flowed from the jaguar's body."

"I remember it all now. I was knocked over as he leaped; but what about yourself? Are you hurt much?"

Tongla would have made light of his wounds if it had not been possible for Roy to see several of them from which the life-current was flowing pro-

fusely, and the instant he realized that the boy's life might be in danger everything else was forgotten.

Kneeling by his side, he strove to bind up the ugly gashes with strips torn from his own shirt, and when the task had been accomplished in a clumsy sort of fashion, the Indian showed every sign of exhaustion.

"Can you walk as far as the hammocks?" Roy asked, anxiously.

"I must; unless it might be better to stay here, and you and Dean come with me, where we shall be partially hidden in case any one should pass up or down the river."

"It is barely daylight now, and there is little chance of visitors for several hours. You shall lie near Dean while I search for a good place in which to hide. According to the appearance of things we are likely to remain here several days."

Tongla made no further protest. He was growing so weak that it was absolutely necessary he should find at once a bed, and, leaning heavily on Roy's shoulder, he walked slowly to where Dean had been left.

The rattlesnake's victim remained in a semi-unconscious condition, as when the last dose of guaco had been administered, and before paying any attention to him, Roy assisted Tongla into the hammock.

"Is there anything more I can do?" Roy asked. "I know very little about dressing wounds, but will try my best to carry out whatever you may suggest."

"If you knew how to find the leche Maria these cuts would soon be healed."

"Tell me what it looks like, and there will be no harm done if I fail."

The Indian described the general appearance of the plant, told where it would most likely be found, and Roy started through the thicket, searching for something he had never seen. During this walk he had ample opportunity to reflect upon the very serious turn in affairs. Unskilled though he was, only one glance at Tongla's wounds had been sufficient to show him it would be necessary for them to remain in camp many days, and it was in the highest degree important that a location be found where there would be no danger of discovery from those who might travel to and fro on the river.

"What is to be done with the boat beats me," Roy said to himself. "I can't drag it through the thicket alone, and whoever saw it would know some one was hiding in the vicinity. She could be set adrift, but it seems as if that ended our chances of ever reaching the coast."

These gloomy reflections were interrupted by the sight of a low, thick-leaved shrub such as Tongla had described the leche Maria to be, and pulling it up by the roots he hurried back to the camp.

"That is what will make me well in a few days," the Indian said in a feeble but joyful tone. "Bruise the leaves into a paste, and we can bind it over the wounds."

An hour was spent in this work; the morning was so far advanced that the heat became almost oppres-

sive. Dean had so far recovered consciousness that Tongla advised he be put in his hammock, since it was no longer necessary the limb should remain buried, and Roy lifted his brother as if he had been but a child.

"There is no longer any fear of the poison," the Indian said, confidently. "The guaco has done its work, and to-morrow he will be well."

"If he doesn't feel able to move around some, I don't know what is to be done. We are taking big risks in staying so near the river even for a few hours, and after I find a location for the new camp the boat must be taken care of; she would betray our whereabouts as certainly as if we hung out a sign stating that we were near-by."

"In two or three days I can help you."

"If your wounds are so far healed as to permit of your moving around in a week, I shall think we are fortunate. Help from you is out of the question, so think up some scheme while I am away."

"Where are you going?"

"To find a camping-place. We will locate a good distance from the river, and it will take some time to find the proper spot."

Tongla made no reply, and Roy, after another look at his brother, who appeared to be in a profound slumber, left the camp armed with one of the fowling-pieces and eleven cartridges, all that remained of their store.

It was necessary no time should be lost in making a change of quarters, and Roy was fully sensible of this fact. Now he resolutely put from his mind all

thoughts of danger, and set about finding such a place as promised complete concealment from travelers.

To this end he went due west from the water, scanning the forest jealously, and before walking ten minutes came upon an open spot which bore every evidence of having been cultivated.

This promised to be a very disagreeable discovery, for it was only reasonable to suppose a tribe of Indians were in the vicinity, and he stole cautiously forward until it was possible to see a tiny hut which looked hardly large enough to provide a shelter for more than one or two persons.

"According to the size of that there can't be very many people living here," he said to himself, "and I'll run the risk of asking them for assistance."

He had hardly arrived at this conclusion, and was about to step out from among the foliage, when a man came around the corner of the building.

This in itself would have caused Roy no surprise, for he was half expecting some such appearance; but his astonishment bordered on bewilderment as he saw that the stranger was white.

In another instant he had come into full view, and now the surprise was mutual, the man gazing at the boy as if doubting the evidence of his own senses.

In the fewest possible words Roy explained why he was there, concluding by saying:

"Both my companions are unable to move; there is every chance Indians will come up the river, and we shall be taken prisoners, as at the Woolwa village, unless some move is made immediately."

The stranger looked at the lad curiously for a moment and then called, sharply:

"Pedrito!"

In response to this summons a small boy, who evidently had both Spanish and Indian blood in his veins, came from among the foliage in the rear of the house and stood as if awaiting orders. The man spoke rapidly, in a language which Roy did not understand, and then said to his visitor:

"We will go at once for your friends. They can remain with me until you are ready to leave. Shall you tramp over the range in order to reach the Coloney plantation?"

"We don't dare to go that way. Tongla thought it would be best to keep on to the coast."

"Is your father at home?"

"He should be by this time."

"And he is alarmed because of your long absence?"

"I am afraid so."

The stranger halted, talked for several moments with the half-breed boy, and then turning abruptly, walked with the little fellow into the hut.

Unable to account for this strange proceeding, Roy remained where he had been left for ten or fifteen minutes, and at the end of that time the man reappeared alone.

"You and I can bring the invalids here," he said as he started in the direction of the river, leaving his guest to follow or remain behind, as might best suit him.

As a matter of course Roy kept very near the

stranger; but not another word was spoken until they arrived at the river-bank, when Roy took the lead and conducted his new friend to the encampment.

The man first examined Dean, much as a physician might have done, and after a few moments said, quietly:

"He is in no danger. To-morrow it will be possible for him to move around a little."

Then he approached Tongla, who displayed every evidence of surprise at seeing a white man in that place, and after taking off the bandages, shook his head to imply that he thought this a serious case.

"I will make a litter," he said to Roy. "The Indian must be carried, or the wounds may re-open, when he would surely bleed to death."

"Is he wounded badly?"

"He may recover sooner than I expect," was the evasive reply, as the man set about hewing down several small saplings with which to construct a litter.

Roy insisted on aiding him, and while they worked the stranger became more communicative.

"It kinder surprised you to see a white man in this part of the country, I reckon?"

"That is a fact. I don't think even Tongla knew any one lived near here."

"It ain't safe to make many acquaintances, an' I keep pretty snug the greater portion of the time. You see I've got considerable curiosity in these 'ere buried cities, an' as there happens to be one close by

that hasn't been overhauled very much, I kinder lay low, with Pedrito an' his father to help along in the way of huntin' an' fishin'."

Roy believed he knew why this man, who used such an unmistakable Yankee twang, was interested in buried cities. The golden idols, which looked like so many packages of provisions, told what might be found among these vestiges of a forgotten race, and it was safe to assume the stranger had come in search of treasure.

"How long have you been here?"

"Nigh on to a year."

"Do you intend to remain permanently?"

"Bless you, no. I'm about ready to leave now, an' shouldn't be surprised if we traveled together when that Indian of yours can walk."

"We shall be more than glad of your company, Mr.——"

"My name is Wiggle—Seth Wiggle."

"If you are with us, there will be more chance of resisting an attack in case one is made."

"I don't count on takin' any risks when I get ready to leave this place. I haven't got much truck to carry, but want to count on takin' through what I've been gatherin'."

At this intimation of his having found treasure, at least that was the construction Roy put upon it, the latter was almost tempted to reveal his own secret; but after a few seconds' reflection he decided it might not be safe. Forty pounds of gold would induce many men to commit a great crime; and although Mr. Wiggle appeared to be honest, there

was no urgent reason why he should be given an opportunity to act otherwise.

While working, the searcher among buried cities asked many questions relative to Roy's father, and his prospects for making indigo-raising a profitable enterprise, and by the time his curiosity had been gratified the litter was completed.

"We'll carry your brother first," Mr. Wiggle said, as he approached the hammock. "You needn't take him out, but just slack up on the ropes till he is lowered gently on to the wagon."

By traveling as rapidly as the tangled foliage would permit, the first invalid was swinging in his hammock under the shade of a venerable logwood-tree at the rear of the Yankee's hut in a very short space of time, and the bearers were on their way to the encampment again.

Tongla had grown rapidly worse when they saw him again, and the man said, with a troubled look:

"That is just what I was afraid of. The fever has set in, an' we shall have him on our hands a long spell."

"Why should he have a fever?" Roy asked, in surprise.

"It most always follows a row of this kind; but if he comes out of it the marks of the jaguar's claws won't amount to very much, though he'll be likely to carry the scars as long as he lives."

The Indian boy was placed on the litter, as Dean had been; and then the bearers were forced to walk slowly lest too severe jolting should prove fatal.

It was nearly noon when Tongla had been cared

for; and, despite the intense heat, Mr. Wiggle proposed that no time be lost in putting the pitpan out of sight.

"I don't reckon your luggage is very valuable," he said; "but you'll likely need it, an' we'd better get the stuff up here right soon."

Roy thought it strange that Pedrito was not called to remain with the invalids during his and Mr. Wiggle's absence; but as the latter gave no sign of summoning him, nothing could be said.

But little time was spent in caring for the pitpan. She was carried into the thicket, about a hundred yards from the river, and there left to the mercy of the first who might chance to discover the hiding-place.

When it came to a question of transporting the provisions to the hut, Roy was careful to take the bundles in which were packed the idols lest the great weight should arouse suspicion, and he staggered on under the burden, trying to appear as if it was no heavier than Mr. Wiggle's share.

Both the laborers felt thoroughly tired when this last task had been performed, and until the sun had sunk low in the western heavens nothing was done save to wait upon the invalids.

Dean was very nearly himself by this time, but Tongla had continued to grow worse, until now he did not appear to know those around him, but talked constantly in his native language.

"What shall we do if he is sick a long while?" Dean asked, anxiously; and his brother replied, with a sigh:

"I don't know; but one thing is certain—we are bound to stay by him."

"That goes without saying; but, Roy, it surely does seem as if there was some truth in what he has said about the vengeance of the gods. I don't believe three fellows could again run into as much danger in the same time as we have since leaving the ruins. Matters seemed bad enough when we were at the Woolwa village, but they are much worse now, and it appears as if we should never reach the coast."

"We mustn't think of such foolish things. Of course we know those images of gold can have nothing to do with our misadventures, and it isn't well even to speak of the ridiculous idea. When we leave here this man is to go with us, and I fancy our troubles will be over."

"What's that? Talkin' about gettin' home, eh?" And as he spoke Mr. Wiggle came from the hut, where he had been enjoying his siesta. "Don't get downhearted, for I'll see to it there's nothin' to harm when we shake the dust of this place off our feet. I'm countin' on goin' to the indigo plantation with you, for it may be I'll try my hand at the same business, an' it'll be a good chance to see how the thing's done."

Then the gentleman began to cook a hearty supper, not hesitating to avail himself of Roy's offer that the roasted birds and tapir-meat be used, and the boys were at a loss to understand the reason for Pedrito's continued absence.

Mr. Wiggle was by no means an adept in the art

of preparing chocolate; but he made up in quantity what was lacking in quality, and the white boys were not disposed to find fault. But for this man they would have been alone with Tongla, uncertain as to what should be done to give him relief, and everything seemed very nearly correct.

When the evening meal had been eaten the Indian boy's hammock, with him in it, was carried to the one room of the hut where he would be sheltered from the dew, and then Mr. Wiggle proposed that they "turn in" for the night.

"I'll allow that it's a little early," he said, "but we've got considerable work to do, an' the mosquitoes make things a trifle lively unless a fellow sticks his head into smoke so thick that it's an open question in my mind as to which is the worst."

"Don't you stand watch?" Roy asked.

"Not a bit of it. Why should we? This is too near what the Indians call the river god's home for us to be bothered with visitors, an' I go in for gettin' a full night's sleep."

This arrangement was perfectly satisfactory to Roy, and it was not yet nine o'clock when all the party, with the possible exception of Tongla, were wrapped in profound slumber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RESCUED.

SEVERAL times during the night Mr. Wiggle attended to the wounded boy's wants in the way of giving him water, renewing the poultices of cooling leaves, or feeding him with small portions of plantains, and when the morning dawned he appeared to be quite comfortable.

Dean was as well as usual. The effects of the guaco yet remained in some slight degree, but not to the extent of impairing his health.

"I feel even better than before the snake bit me," he said, laughingly; "and if Mr. Wiggle wants any work done, I'm the one on whom to call."

"You can tend to the Indian, your brother may see to the cooking, an' I'll snoop 'round a bit on a job that oughter be 'tended to right away."

Roy began his portion of the task at once, for the host had started toward the river as he ceased speaking, and Dean took advantage of the opportunity to search for the same kind of palm-trees as Tongla had used in making the imitation lemonade.

"I know how good that stuff tastes when a fellow is sick and thirsty," he said, "and we'll give him all he wants."

Dean had finished the work, five palms standing against the hut as proof of his industry, when Mr. Wiggle returned. The breakfast had been prepared for some time, and the re-warmed roasts not improved by waiting; but the owner of the hut did not make any comments; he appeared troubled, and Roy asked:

"Did you see anything while at the river?"

"I didn't go there."

"I thought from the way you looked that the Indians might be around."

"It wouldn't trouble me much if fifty of 'em should send word that they were comin' to clean me out. A good repeatin' rifle an' two revolvers will keep a whole tribe at a respectful distance. I was kinder fussin' about somethin' else."

Inasmuch as he did not explain what this "something" was, Roy remained silent, and after a few moments Dean was about to stroll through the thicket at the back of the hut, when Mr. Wiggle said, almost sharply:

"Hold on a minute, I've got a word to say."

Dean sat down on the ground prepared to give his undivided attention, and Roy looked up expectantly; but the gentleman showed no sign of saying his "word."

Five minutes passed, and when the boys had begun to believe they were mistaken in thinking he requested them to remain, Mr. Wiggle said, speaking with great deliberation:

"I've never told you why I camped out here in the wilderness, nor I wouldn't if the thing could be

helped; but seein's how we'll most likely travel together after Pedrito gets back, it's no use to hang off. I come here to snoop 'round these buried cities thinkin' I might find somethin' worth carryin' off."

"You mean gold," Roy interrupted.

"Why? What do you know about such a metal bein' in these places?"

Roy hesitated an instant, and then replied, cautiously:

"There could hardly be anything else, for these towns have been abandoned hundreds of years."

"Can you tell me who did build 'em?" and now Mr. Wiggle showed signs of great interest. "I've puzzled my head a sight tryin' to figger out how an' why the fine houses, for they ain't much less than palaces, have been left to go to the dogs."

"A good many people have tried the same thing, but no one has yet succeeded to the satisfaction of the students in such matters."

"Tell me what you've heard about them."

"I have read that the ruins were discovered by the Spaniards in the year 1750, and they then appeared to have been long deserted. Some believe they were built by the Toltecs, and others that the Aztecs—or a portion of the nation—were in possession of the country as far south as this. It seems to be the opinion of all who have studied them that the cities were built about the year 1100, and it is said that the general style of the buildings are strikingly like specimens of architecture known to have been erected by the Toltecs in the seventh century."

"That's quite a spell ago, ain't it?"

"Yes," Roy replied, laughingly; "but I thought you had something to tell us about the ruins."

"Me? Bless you, no—leastways, nothin' about the towns themselves. I kinder drifted 'round here, thinkin' it might be possible to dicker with the natives, an' got set on the piles of stone, thinkin' gold might be found, for people do say there has been a pile of the yellow stuff in this country."

"And you have been hunting for it?"

"Well, to tell the truth I have done somethin' of that sort."

"Did you find any?"

Mr. Wiggle looked at the questioner an instant, as if asking himself whether it would be safe to trust the boys, and, evidently deciding in the affirmative, he began, with a great show of confidence:

"I ain't sayin' as this story'd been told if I didn't count on leavin' here with you, when the whole thing would have to come out. I've found a little of what the miners call 'color,' an' it's goin' to make a decently big load."

Now Roy did not hesitate to reveal his secret, and he asked, as he unrolled the largest idol from its wrapping of leaves:

"Did you find your gold in this form?"

"Geewhittaker! If I didn't know you brought that with you I'd say it was one I've got up here in the woods. Where did you get it?"

Roy told his story in detail, and when he concluded the elder treasure-finder said, thoughtfully:

"I never thought the Indians might kick up a

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row about them little figgers bein' lugged off! So that was why you didn't dare to go over the range?"

"The Sukia and her followers are probably guarding all the passes, in the belief that we must cross in order to reach home."

"You'll outwit 'em yet," Mr. Wiggle said, with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"I wish we were sure of that," Dean replied, despondently; "but according to the way we have been traveling we shall be gray-headed before getting out of the river."

"I'll answer for it that that part comes all right. Hold on a bit, an' I'll show you some of my figgers."

Mr. Wiggle ran into the thicket hastily, and while he was absent Roy said, hopefully:

"I truly believe the greater portion of our troubles are over. He is quite as eager as we to leave here, and will find a way when Tongla is able to travel."

At this point the Indian boy awoke, and asked for a drink of water.

"You shall have what you gave me," Dean cried, as he brought one of the palm-trunks. "I fixed it a few hours ago, and there is enough for a good, big drink."

The liquid was refreshing, and after Tongla had satisfied his thirst with a generous quantity he whispered:

"Where are we?"

Roy told him all they had learned regarding Mr.

Wiggle, and he closed his eyes with the air of one who feels perfectly at ease.

"There will be no trouble if you have found another white man, and I must make haste to get well that we may start once more for the hacienda."

"There is plenty of time; no move will be made until you are strong again."

At this moment the owner of the hut returned, bearing in his arms, as if they were a heavy burden, four golden figures similar to those the boys had brought so far.

"Not bad, eh?" Mr. Wiggle asked with pride, as he stood them against the hut and then stepped back a few paces to observe the general effect. "I've got two more, an' reckon the mine is about cleaned out. It may be that the place yours came from would pan out pretty well, but more'n one man would be needed."

Tongla raised his head sufficiently to see the yellow figures, and then laid back again with a long-drawn sigh. That which caused the white members of the party so much joy was to him the symbol of suffering to be endured in the future, and the sight was not pleasing.

During the remainder of the day but little was talked of save the idols, and only when the party retired was the subject dropped. Mr. Wiggle offered to take them to the ruins where his discoveries were made, but the invitation was rejected, because they had no especial desire to see what could be but little different from the collection of buildings where many disagreeable hours had been spent.

There was nothing to be done save wait until Tongla recovered, and during the next week Roy and Dean did little else save sit by his side or lounge in their hammocks.

Mr. Wiggle did all the hunting necessary to supply the household with food, and insisted on acting as cook, because, as he said, "some folks could fix up a meal better than others."

It was a reflection upon Roy's skill as cook, but that did not trouble him, in view of the fact that he was thus relieved from a very disagreeable duty. He and his brother waited attentively upon the invalid, and had the great satisfaction of seeing him improve each day, until the time came when he was able to take short walks during the earlier portions of the day.

"It won't be long now before we can leave," Dean said, on the morning of the ninth day. "With Mr. Wiggle to help, we can do the paddling, and all he has to do is play the part of passenger."

"I am ready now," the Indian said, quickly. "It is not well to stay here too long, although the white man should know best."

"Let's speak to him about going," Dean suggested; and his brother replied:

"I fancy he has sent that boy Pedrito somewhere, and does not intend to leave here until he comes back."

"Then we are likely to start pretty soon;" and Dean pointed toward a more open portion of the forest, where the boy was emerging from among the trees.

As Roy looked up two or three men appeared directly behind Pedrito, as if following him.

"Do you suppose he went for them?" Dean asked; and the next instant he leaped to his feet with a cry of joy, for he saw directly in the rear of the new-comers his own father, who appeared to be leading quite a body of men.

The boys were plunged into a state of almost delirious delight, and it was not until nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed that they thought to ask how he happened to be there in Pedrito's company.

"I reckon I'm to blame for that part of it," Mr. Wiggle said, with a smirk of satisfaction. "When you told me where his plantation was located, I kinder figgered that Pedrito could find the place, or his father might, which amounts to the same thing, so I packed him off before we brought either Dean or Tongla up to the hut."

"Then mother is at home?" Roy asked.

"Yes, and has been in a painful state of anxiety until this boy arrived, but now believes I will bring you back in safety."

Not until after a hearty meal had been served would Mr. Wiggle give his guests an opportunity for a confidential chat.

"It don't pay to talk on an empty stomach, an' I reckon you'll do a good deal of chinnin' before the yarn has been spun."

It was a long story which the boys had to tell, and then their host had a few words to say.

"I counted on a little lift when I sent Pedrito after you," he said to Mr. Coloney. "I've got a bit

of gold myself, an' if we all travel together there won't be much danger of losin' it. It'll be a fair thing all around, an' you've got men enough to divide up the loads so they won't be heavy."

"What you have done for my sons is sufficient to make me your creditor, and I shall be only too well pleased to render any service in my power."

This portion of the matter being settled, it simply remained to fix the time of departure, which Tongla insisted should be on the next day.

"With no load to carry I can travel as well now as before the jaguar leaped upon me, therefore it is not necessary to remain a moment after you are rested."

Mr. Coloney thought as did the Indian, and it was decided to leave on the following morning at sunrise.

There is no reason to write any more relative to the treasure-finders. Mr. Coloney's party was so large that the Sukia's followers were not feared, and the journey was made without incident. One week from the time of Perdito's return the boys were with their mother, and no happier family could have been found in Nicaragua.

Mr. Wiggle remained on the plantation a fortnight, when, with an escort consisting of four trusty Indians, Perdito and his father, he started for the ruins where the boys found their treasure. Whether he succeeded in his purpose none of our friends ever knew, for not one of the party was seen again, and if they did not follow down the river to the coast, the Sukia's followers must have

wreaked the vengeance from which the boys escaped.

What was done with the three idols?

At present they are still in Mr. Coloney's possession, but a letter from Roy states that they are soon to be sold, and with the proceeds a second indigo plantation is to be purchased for the young TREASURE-FINDERS.

THE END.

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